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# SERMONS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

THE LATE REV. JAMES SAURIN.

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VOL. VII.

*BY JOSEPH SUTCLIFFE.*



# SERMONS

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH

OF

THE LATE REV. JAMES SAURIN,

PASTOR OF THE FRENCH CHURCH AT THE HAGUE.

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BY JOSEPH SUTCLIFFE.

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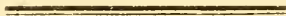
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VOLUME VII.

*ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.*



SECOND AMERICAN  
FROM THE FIFTH LONDON EDITION.



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## PREFACE.

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SAURIN's Sermons, one hundred and sixty-eight in number, are comprised in twelve volumes. I have read them with edification and delight. Actuated by these sentiments, I doubted whether I could better employ my leisure moments, than in preparing an additional volume, to those already before the English reader.

The Three Discourses, on the Delay of Conversion, are a masterly performance, and in general, a model of pulpit eloquence. They are not less distinguished by variety and strength of argument, than by pathos and unction : and they rise in excellence as the reader proceeds. Hence, I fully concur in opinion with Dupont, and the succeeding editors, who have given the first place to these Discourses : my sole surprise is, that they were not translated before. Whether they were reserved to ornament a future volume, or whether the addresses to the unregenerate were deemed too severe and strong, I am unable to determine. By a cloud of arguments derived from reason, from revelation, and from experience, our author certainly displays the full effusions of his heart, and in language unfettered by the fear of man. The regular applications in the first and second Sermons, are executed in such a style of su-

perior merit, that I lament the deficiency of language to convey his sentiments with adequate effect.

On the subject of warm and animated addresses to wicked and unregenerate men, if I might be heard by those who fill the sanctuary, I would venture to say, that the general character of English Sermons, is by far too mild and calm. On reading the late Dr. Enfield's English Preacher, and, finding on this gentleman's tablet of honour, names which constitute the glory of our national Church, I seem unwilling to believe my senses, and ready to deny, that Tillotson, Atterbury, Butler, Chandler, Coneybeare, Seed, Sherlock, Waterland, and others could have been so relaxed and unguarded, as to preach so many Sermons equally acceptable to the orthodox and to the Socinian reader. Those mild and affable recommendations of virtue and religion; those gentle dissuasives from immorality and vice, have been found, for a whole century, unproductive of effect. Hence, all judicious men must admit the propriety of meeting the awful vices of the present age, with remedies more efficient and strong.

Our increase of population, our vast extent of commerce, and the consequent influx of wealth and luxury, have, to an alarming degree, biassed the national character towards dissipation, irreligion, and vice. We see a croud of families rapidly advanced to affluence, and dashing away in the circles of gay and giddy life;—we see profane theatres, assembly-rooms, and watering-places crowded with people devoted to pleasure, and unacquainted with the duties they owe to God;—we see a metropolis, in which it



is estimated, that not more than one adult out of fifteen, attends any place of divine worship.—Ought not Ministers, so circumstanced, to take the alarm, and to weep for the desolations of the sanctuary? If impiety and effeminacy were, confessedly, the causes of the desolation of Greece and Rome, ought we not to be peculiarly alarmed for our country; and, while our brave warriors are defending it abroad, endeavour to heal at home the evils which corrode the vitals? Ought we not to adopt a mode of preaching, like that which first subdued the enemies of the cross? If our former mode of preaching have failed of effect; if the usual arguments from Scripture have no weight; ought we not to modify those arguments according to existing circumstances, that, fighting the sinner on the ground of reason, and maintaining the rights of God at the bar of conscience, we may vanquish the infidelity of his heart? The wound must be opened before he will welcome the Balm of Calvary, and be enraptured with the glory and fulness of the gospel. Hence, I am fully of opinion, that we ought to go back to the purest models of preaching; that, addressing the sinner in the striking language of his own heart, we may see our country reformed, and believers adorned with virtue and grace.

But, though our author be an eminent model in addressing the unregenerate, he is by no means explicit and full, on the doctrines of the Spirit; his talents were consequently defective in building up believers, and edifying the Church. It is true, he is orthodox and clear, as far as he goes; and he fully

admits the Scripture language on the doctrine of assurance : but he restricts the grace to some highly favoured souls, and seems to have no idea of its being the general privilege of the children of God. Hence this doctrine, which especially abounds in the New Testament, occupies only a diminutive place in his vast course of Sermons. On this subject, indeed, he frankly confesses his fears of *enthusiasm* ; and, to do him justice, it seems the only thing he feared in the pulpit.

But, however prepossessing and laudable this caution may appear in the discussion of mysterious truths, it by no means associates the ideas we have of the Divine compassion, and the apprehensions which awakened persons entertain on account of their sins. Conscious of guilt, on the one hand ; and assured, on the other, that *the wages of sin is death*, mere evangelical arguments are inadequate to allay their fears, and assuage their griefs. Nothing will do, but a *sense* of pardon, sufficiently clear and strong to counteract their *sense* of guilt. Nothing but the love of God shed abroad in the heart, can disperse their grief and fear. Rom. v. 5. Luke xxiv. 32. 1 John iv. 18. Nothing but the Spirit of adoption can remove the spirit of bondage, by a direct assurance, that we are the children of God. Rom. viii. 15, 16. Every awakened sinner needs, as much as the inspired prophet, the peace which passeth all understanding, to compose his conscience ; the Spirit of holiness to regenerate his heart ; the Spirit of grace and supplication, to assist him in prayer ; the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,

and the joy unspeakable and full of glory, to adopt the language of praise and thanksgiving, which seem to have been the general sentiments of the regenerate in the acts of devotion. That is the most satisfactory ground of assurance, when we hope to enjoy the inheritance, because we have the earnest ; and hope to dwell with God, because he already dwells with us, adorning our piety with the correspondent fruits of righteousness. Revelation and reason here perfectly accord : *Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find. If ye being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him ?* Hence, SAURIN, on this subject, was by far too contracted in restricting his grace to a few highly favoured souls.

Further still, it is not enough for a Minister to beat and overpower his audience with arguments ; it is not enough that many of his hearers weep under the word, and form good resolutions for the future ; they must be assisted in devotion ; helped in aspirations ; and encouraged to expect a blessing before they depart from the house of God.—How is it, that the good impressions made on our hearers so generally die away ; and that *their devotion is but as the morning cloud* ? After making just deductions for the weakness and inconstancy of men ; after allowing for the defects which business and company produce on the mind, the grand cause is, the not exhorting them to look for an instantaneous deliverance by faith. In many parts of the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms, the suppliants came to the

throne of grace, in the greatest trouble and distress, and they went away rejoicing. Now, these Psalms, I take to be exact celebrations of what God did by providence and grace for the worshippers. Hence we should exhort all penitents to expect the like deliverance, God being ready to shine on all hearts the moment repentance has prepared them for the reception of his grace.

Some may here object, that many well-disposed Christians, whose piety has been adorned with benevolence, have never, on the subject of assurance, been able to express themselves in the high and heavenly language of inspired men; and that they have doubted, whether *the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins*, (Luke i. 77,) were attainable in this life.—Perhaps, on enquiry, those well-disposed Christians, whose sincerity I revere, have sat under a ministry, which scarcely went so far on the doctrines of the Spirit as SAURIN.—Perhaps they have sought salvation, partly by their works, instead of seeking it solely by faith in the merits or righteousness of Jesus Christ. Perhaps they have joined approaches to the altars of God, with the amusements of the age; and always been kept in arrears in their reckonings with Heaven. Perhaps their religious connections have hindered, rather than furthered, their religious attainments. If these sincere Christians were properly assisted by experienced people; if, some *Aquila and Priscilla* were to expound unto them the way of God more perfectly, (Acts xviii. 26,) they would soon emerge out of darkness into marvellous light; they could not long survey the



history of the Redeemer's passion, without loving him again ; they could not review his victories without encouragement ; they could not contemplate the effusions of his grace, without a participation of his comfort. They would soon receive,

“ What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy,  
“ The soul's calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy.”

Another defect of our author, (if my opinion be correct is, that he sometimes aims at oratorical strokes, and indulges in argument and language not readily comprehended by the better instructed among the poor. This should caution others. True eloquence is the voice of nature, so rich in thought, so abundant in motives, and happy in expression, as to supersede redundant and meretricious ornament. It unfolds the treasures of knowledge, displays the amiableness of virtue, and unveils the deformity of vice, with the utmost simplicity and ease. It captivates the mind, and sways the passions of an audience in addresses apparently destitute of study or art : art, indeed, can never attain it ; it is the soul of a preacher speaking to the heart of his hearers. However, SAURIN ought to have an indulgence which scarcely any other can claim. He addressed at the Hague, an audience of two thousand persons, composed of courtiers, of magistrates, of merchants, and strangers, who were driven by persecution from every part of France. Hence, it became him to speak with dignity appropriate to his situation. And if, in point of pure eloquence, he was a single

shade below Masillon, he has far exceeded him as a divine.

With regard to the peculiar opinions of the religious denominations, this venerable Minister discovered superior knowledge, and admirable moderation. Commissioned to preach the gospel to every creature, he magnifies the love of God to man; and charges the sinner with being the sole cause of his own destruction. [Sermon, Hosea xiii. 9.] Though he asserts the perseverance of the saints, it is, nevertheless, with such restrictions as tend to avoid disgusting persons of opposite sentiments. Against Antinomianism, so dangerous to salvation, he is tremendously severe: and it were to be wished that the supporters of these opinions would profit by his arguments. It is much safer to direct our efforts, that our hearers may resemble the God they worship, than trust to a mere code of religious opinions dissonant to a multitude of Scriptures.

May Heaven bless to the reader this additional mite to the store of public knowledge, and make it advantageous to his best interests, and eternal joy!

JOSEPH SUTCLIFFE.

*Halifax, Nov. 21, 1805.*

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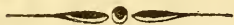
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# SERMON I.

*On the Delay of Conversion.*



ISAIAH IV. 6.

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

THAT is a singular oath, recorded in the tenth chapter of the Revelation. St. John saw an angel ; an angel *clothed with a cloud ; a rainbow encircled his head, his countenance was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. He stood on the earth and the sea. He swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, that there should be time no longer.* By this oath, if we may credit some critics, the angel announces to the Jews, that their measure was full, that their days of visitation were expired, and that God was about to complete, by abandoning them to the licentious armies of the Emperor Adrian, the vengeance he had already begun by Titus and Vespasian.

We will not dispute this particular notion, but consider the oath in a more extended view. This angel stands upon the earth and the sea ; he speaks to all the inhabitants of the world ; he lifts his voice, my brethren, and teaches a most awful, but most important truth of religion and morality, that the mercy of God, so infinitely diversified, has, however, its restrictions and bounds. It is infinite, for it embraces

all mankind. It makes no distinction between *the Jew and the Greek, the Barbarian and the Scythian*. It pardons insults the most notorious, crimes the most provoking ; and, extricating the sinner from the abyss of misery, opens to him the way to supreme felicity. But it is limited. When the sinner becomes obstinate, when he long resists, when he defers conversion, God shuts up the bowels of his compassion, and rejects the prayer of those who are hardened against his voice.

From this awful principle, Isaiah deduces the doctrine which constitutes the subject of our text. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near*. Dispensing with minuteness of method, we shall not stop to define the terms, *Seek ye the Lord*, and *call ye upon him*. Whatever mistakes we may be liable to make on this head, and however disposed we may be to confound the appearance of conversion with conversion itself, this, it must be acknowledged, is not the most destructive. We propose to-day to investigate the true cause, to sound the depths of our depravity, to dissipate, if possible, the illusive charm which destroys so many of the Christian world, and of which Satan so successfully avails himself for their seduction. This delusion, this charm, I appeal to your consciences, consists of I know not what, confused ideas we have formed of the divine mercy, fluctuating purposes of conversion on the brink of futurity, and chimerical confidence of success whenever we shall enter on the work.

On the delay of conversion, we shall make a series of reflections, derived from three sources.—From *man* ;—from the *scriptures* ;—and from *experience*. We shall have recourse in order to religion, history, and experience, to make us sensible of the dangerous consequences of deferring the work. In the first place, we shall endeavour to prove from our own constitution, that it is difficult, not to say impossible, to be converted after having wasted life in vice. We shall secondly demonstrate that Revelation perfectly accords with nature on this head ; and that whatever the Bible has taught concerning the efficacy of grace, the supernatural aids of the Spirit, and the extent of mercy, favour in no respect the delay of conversion.—Thirdly, we shall endeavour to confirm the doctrines of reason and revelation, by daily observations on those who defer the change. These reflections would undoubtedly produce a better effect delivered at once than divided, and I would wish to dismiss the hearer convinced, persuaded, and overpowered with the mass of argument ; but we must proportion the discourse to the attention of the audience, and to our own weakness. We design three discourses on this subject, and shall confine ourselves to-day to the first head.

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* On this subject, to be discussed in order, shall our voice resound for the present hour ; if Providence permit us to ascend this pulpit once more, it shall be resumed ; if we ascend it the third time, we will still cry, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is*

*near.* If a Christian minister ought to be heard with attention, if deference ought to be paid to his doctrine, may this charge change the face of this church! May the scales fall from our eyes! and may the spiritually blind recover their sight!

Our mind, prevented by passion and prejudice, requires divine assistance in its ordinary reflections; but attacking the sinner in his chief fort and last retreat, I do need thy invincible power, O my God, and I expect every aid from thy support.

I. Our own constitution shall supply us to-day with arguments on the delay of conversion. It is clear that we carry in our own breast principles which render conversion difficult, and I may add, impossible, if deferred to a certain period. To comprehend this, form in your mind an adequate idea of conversion, and fully admit, that the soul, in order to possess this state of grace, must acquire two essential dispositions; it must be illuminated; it must be sanctified. It must understand the truths of religion, and conform to its precepts.

First. You cannot become regenerate unless you know the truths of religion. Not that we would preach the gospel to you as a discipline having no object but the exercise of speculation. We neither wish to make the Christian a philosopher, nor to encumber his mind with a thousand questions agitated in the schools. Much less would we elevate salvation above the comprehension of persons of common understanding; who, being incapable of abstruse thought, would be cut off from the divine favour, if this change required profound reflection, and refin-



ed investigation. It cannot, however, be disputed, that every man should be instructed according to his situation in life, and according to the capacity he has received from heaven. In a word, a Christian ought to be a Christian, not because he has been educated in the principles of Christianity transmitted by his fathers, but because those principles came from God.

To have contrary dispositions, to follow a religion from obstinacy, or prejudice, is equally to renounce the dignity of a man, a Christian and a Protestant:—The dignity of a man, who, endowed with intelligence, should never decide on important subjects without consulting his understanding, given to guide and conduct him:—The dignity of a Christian; for the gospel reveals a God who may be known, John iv. 22; it requires us to *prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.* 1 Thess. v. 21.—The dignity of a Protestant: for it is the foundation and distinguishing article of the Reformation, that submission to human creeds is a bondage unworthy of him whom the *Son has made free.* Inquiry, knowledge, and investigation are the leading points of religion, and the first paths, so to speak, by which we are to *seek the Lord.*

The second disposition is sanctification. The truths proposed in scripture for examination and belief, are not presented to excite vain speculation, or gratify curiosity. They are truths designed to produce a divine influence on the heart and life. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar. If you know these things, happy are*

*you, if you do them. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction,* 1 John ii. 4. John xiii. 17. James i. 27. When we speak of Christian obedience, we do not mean some transient acts of devotion ; we mean a submission proceeding from a source of holiness, which, however mixed with imperfection in its efforts, piety is always the predominant disposition of the heart, and virtue triumphant over vice.

These two points being indisputably established, we may prove, I am confident, from our own constitution, that a tardy conversion ought always to be suspected ; and that, by deferring the work, we risk the forfeiture of the grace.—Follow us in these arguments.

This is true, first, with regard to the light essential to conversion. Here, my brethren, it were to have been wished, that each of you had studied the human constitution ; that you had attentively considered the mode in which the soul and body are united, the close ties which subsist between the intelligence that thinks within, and the body to which it is united. We are not pure spirit, the soul is a lodger in matter, and on the temperature of this matter depends the success of our researches after truth, and consequently after religion.

Now, my brethren, every period and age of life is not alike proper for disposing the body to this happy temperature, which leaves the soul at liberty for reflection and thought. The powers of the brain fail with years, the senses become dull, the spirits



evaporate, the memory weakens, the blood chills in the veins, and a cloud of darkness envelopes all the faculties. Hence the drowsiness of aged people ; hence the difficulty of receiving new impressions ; hence the return of ancient objects ; hence the obstinacy in their sentiments ; hence the almost universal defect of knowledge and comprehension ; whereas people less advanced in age have usually an easy mind, a retentive memory, a happy conception, and a teachable temper. If we, therefore, defer the acquisition of religious knowledge till age has chilled the blood, obscured the understanding, enfeebled the memory, and confirmed prejudice and obstinacy, it is almost impossible to be in a situation to acquire that information without which our religion can neither be agreeable to God, afford us solid consolation in affliction, nor motive sufficient against temptation.

If this reflection do not strike you with sufficient force, follow man in the succeeding ages of life. The love of pleasure predominates in his early years, and the dissipations of the world allure him from the study of religion. The sentiments of conscience are heard, however, notwithstanding the tumult of a thousand passions : they suggest, that, in order to peace of conscience, he must either be religious, or persuade himself that religion is altogether a phantom. What does a man do in this situation ? He becomes either incredulous or superstitious. He believes without examination and discussion, that he has been educated in the bosom of truth ; that the religion of his fathers is the only one which can be good ; or rather he re-

gards religion only on the side of those difficulties which infidels oppose, and employs all his strength of intellect to augment those difficulties, and to evade their evidence. Thus he dismisses religion to escape his conscience, and becomes an obstinate atheist to be calm in crimes. Thus he wastes his youth, time flies, years accumulate, notions become strong ; impressions fixed in the brain ; and the brain gradually loses that suppleness of which we shall now speak.

A period arrives in which these passions seem to die ; and as they were the sole cause of rendering that man superstitious, or incredulous, it seems that incredulity and superstition would vanish with the the passions. Wishful to profit by the circumstance ; we endeavor to dissipate the illusion ; we summons the man to go back to the first source of his errors ; we talk ; we prove ; we reason ; but all is unavailing care ; as it commonly happens that the aged talk of former times, and recollect the facts which struck them in their youth, while present occurrences leave no trace on the memory, so the old ideas continually run in their mind.

Let us further remark, that the soul not only loses with time the facility of discerning error from truth, but after having for a considerable time habituated itself to converse solely with sensible objects, it is almost impossible to attach it to any other. See that man who has for a course of years been employed in auditing accounts, in examining the nature of trade, the capacity of his companions, the fidelity of his correspondents : propose to him, for instance, the solution of a problem, desire him to investigate the

cause of a phenomenon, the foundation of a system, and you require an impossibility. The mind, however, of this man, who finds these subjects so difficult, and the mind of the philosopher who investigates them with ease, are formed much in the same way. All the difference between them is, that the latter has accustomed himself to the contemplation of mental objects, whereas the other has voluntarily debased himself to sordid pursuits, degraded his understanding, and enslaved it to sensible objects. After having passed our life in this sort of business, without allowing time for reflection, religion becomes an abyss ; the clearest truth, mysterious ; the slightest study, fatigue ; and, when we would fix our thoughts, they are captivated with involuntary deviations.

In a word, the final inconvenience which results from deferring the study of religion, is a distraction and dissipation proceeding from the object which prepossesses the mind. The various scenes of life, presented to the eye, make a strong impression on the soul ; and the ideas will obtrude even when we would divert the attention. Hence distinguished employments, eminent situations, and professions which require intense application, are not commonly the most compatible with salvation. Not only because they rob us, while actually employed, of the time we should devote to God, but because they pursue us in defiance of our efforts. We come to the Lord's house with our bullocks, with our doves, with our projects, with our ships, with our bills of exchange, with our titles, with our equipage, as those

profane Jews whom Jesus Christ once chased from the temple in Jerusalem. There is no need to be a philosopher to perceive the force of this truth ; it requires no evidence but the history of your own life. How often, when retired to the closet to examine your conscience, has worldly speculation interrupted the duty ! How often, when prostrated in the presence of God, has this heart, which you came to offer him, robbed you of your devotion by pursuing earthly objects ! How often, when engaged in sacrificing to the Lord a sacrifice of repentance, has a thousand flights of birds annoyed the sacred service ! Evident proof of the truth we advance ! Every day we see new objects ; these objects leave ideas ; these ideas recur ; and the contracted soul, unable to attend to the ideas it already possesses, and to those it would acquire, becomes incapable of religious investigation. Happy is the man descended from enlightened parents, and instructed like Timothy in the Holy Scriptures from his infancy ! Having consecrated his early life to the study of truth, he has only, in a dying and retiring age, to collect the consolations of a religion magnificent in its promises, and incontestible in its proofs.

Hence we conclude, with regard to the speculative part of salvation, that our conversion becomes the more difficult in proportion as it is deferred. We conclude, with regard to the light of faith, that we must *seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* We must study religion while aided by a recollected mind, and an easy conception. We must, while young, elevate the heart

above sensible objects, and fill the soul with sacred truths before the world has engrossed its capacity.

This truth is susceptible of a yet clearer demonstration, when we consider religion with regard to practice. And as the subject turns on principles to which we usually pay but slight attention, we are especially obliged to request, if you would edify by this discourse, that you would hear attentively. There are subjects less connected, which may be comprehended, notwithstanding a momentary absence of the mind, but this requires constant application, as we lose the whole, by neglecting the smallest part.

Remember, in the first place, what we have already affirmed, that in order to true conversion, it is not sufficient to evidence some partial acts of love to God : the principle must be so profound and permanent, that love shall ever be the predominant disposition of the heart. We should not apprehend that any of you would dispute this assertion, if we should content ourselves with pressing it in a vague and general way ; and if we had no design to draw conclusions directly opposite to the notions of many, and to the practice of most. But at the close of this discourse, unable to evade the consequences which follow the principle, we are strongly persuaded, you will renew the attack on the principle itself, and deny that to which you have already assented. Hence we ought not to proceed before we are agreed what we ought to believe upon this head. We ask you, brethren, Whether you believe it requisite to love God in order to salvation ? We can scarcely think that any of our audience will answer in the negative ;



at least we should fear to speak with much more confidence on this point, and on the necessity of acquiring instruction in order to conversion, than to supercede the obligation of loving God, because it would derogate from the dignity of man, who is obliged to love his benefactor ; from the dignity of a Christian, educated under a covenant which denounces anathemas against those who love not the Lord Jesus ; from the dignity of a Protestant, who cannot be ignorant how all the divines of our communion have exclaimed against the doctrine of Rome on the subject of penance.

Recollect, therefore, my brethren, that we are agreed upon this point ; recollect in the subsequent parts of this discourse, that, in order to conversion, we must have a radical and habitual love to God. This principle being allowed, all that we have to say against the delay of conversion becomes self established. The whole question is reduced to this ; if in a dying hour, if at the extremity of life, if in a short and fleeting moment, you can acquire this habit of divine love, which we have all agreed is necessary to salvation ; if it can be acquired in one moment, then we will preach no more against delay : you act with propriety. Put off, defer, procrastinate even to the last moment, and by an extraordinary precaution, never begin to seek the pleasures of piety till you are abandoned by the pleasures of the world, and satiated by its infamous delights. But if time, labour, and will, are required to form this genuine source of love to God, the necessity of which we have already proved,

you should frankly acknowledge the folly of postponing so important a work for a single moment ; that it is the extreme of madness to defer the task to a dying hour ; and that the prophet cannot too highly exalt his voice, crying to all who regard their salvation, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near.*

This being allowed, we shall establish, on two principles, all that we have to advance upon this subject. First, We cannot acquire any habit without performing the correspondent actions. Language, for instance, is a thing extremely complex. To speak, requires a thousand muscular motions of the body, a thousand movements form the word, and a thousand sounds the articulation. All these at first are extremely difficult ; they appear quite impossible. There is but one way to succeed, that is, to persevere in plying the strings, articulating the sounds, and producing the movements ; then what was at first impossible becomes surmountable, and what becomes surmountable is made easy, and what is easy becomes natural : we speak with such an inconceivable facility as would be incredible, were it not confirmed by experience. The spirits flow to the parts destined for these operations, the channels open, the difficulties recede, the volitions are accomplished : just as a stream, whose waters are turned by the strength of hand and aid of engines, falls by its own weight to places where it could not have been carried but by vast fatigue.

Secondly, When a habit is once rooted, it becomes difficult or impossible to correct it, in proportion as it is confirmed. We see in the human body, that a

man, by distraction or indolence, may suffer his person to degenerate to a wretched situation: if he continue, his wretchedness increases; the body takes its mould; what was a negligence, becomes a necessity; what was a want of attention, becomes a natural and an insurmountable imperfection. Let us apply these principles to our subject, and avail ourselves of their force to dissipate, if possible, the mistakes of mankind concerning their conversation and their virtues. Habits of the mind are formed as habits of the body; the former become as incorrigible as the latter.

First, then, as in the acquisition of a corporeal habit, we must perform the correspondent actions, so in forming the habits of religion, of love, humility, patience, charity, we must habituate ourselves to the duties of patience, humility, and love. We never acquire these virtues but by devotion to their influence: it is not sufficient to be sincere in wishes to attain them; it is not sufficient to form a sudden resolution; we must return to the charge, and by the continued recurrence of actions pursued and repeated, acquire such a source of holiness as may justify us in saying, that such a man is humble, patient, charitable, and full of divine love. Have you never attended those powerful and pathetic sermons, which forced conviction on the most obdurate hearts? Have you never seen those pale, trembling, and weeping assemblies? Have you never seen the hearers affected, alarmed, and resolved to reform their lives? And have you never been surprised to see, after a short interval, each return to those vices he



reviewed with horror, and neglect those virtues which appeared to him so amiable? Whence proceeded so sudden a change? What occasioned a scene, which apparently contradicts every notion we have formed of the human mind? Behold it here. This piety, this devotion, those tears proceeded from an extraneous cause, and not from a habit formed by a course of actions, and a fund acquired by labour and diligence. The cause ceasing, the effects subside, the preacher is silent, and the devotion is closed. Whereas the actions of life, proceeding from a source of worldly affections incessantly return, just as a torrent, obstructed by the raising of a bank, takes an irregular course, and rushes forth with impetuosity whenever the bank is removed.

Further, we must not only engage in the offices of piety to form the habit, but they must be frequent; just as we repeat acts of vice to form a vicious habit. The reason is this, my brethren, and can you be ignorant? Who does not feel it in his own breast? I carry it in my own wicked heart; I know it by the sad tests of sentiment and experience. The reason is obvious; habits of vice are found conformable to our natural propensity; they are found already formed within, in the germ of corruption which we bring into the world. *We are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin*, Psalm li. 7. We make a rapid progress in the career of vice. We arrive without difficulty at perfection in the works of darkness. The pupil in a short course becomes a master in the school of the world and of the devil; and it is not

at all surprising, that a man should at once become luxurious, covetous, and implacable, because he carries in his own breast the principles of all these vices.

But the habits of holiness are directly opposed to our constitution. They obstruct all its propensities, and offer, in I may so speak, violence to nature. When we wish to become converts, we assume a double task ; we must demolish, we must build ; we must demolish corruption, before we can erect the edifice of grace. We must, like those Jews who raised the walls of Jerusalem, work with *the sword in one hand and the instrument in the other* ; Neh. iv. 17. equally assiduous to produce that which is not, as to destroy that which already exists.

Such is the way, and the only way, by which we can expect the establishment of grace in the heart ; it is by unremitting labour, by perseverance in duty, and by perpetual vigilance. Now, who is there among you that does not perceive the folly of those who procrastinate their conversion ? who imagine that a word from a minister, a prospect of death, a sudden resolution, can instantaneously produce perfection of virtue ? O wretched philosophy ! extravagant presumption ! idle reverie, that overturns the whole system of original corruption, and the mechanism of the human frame. I should as soon expect to find a man, who could play skilfully on an instrument without having acquired the art by practice and application ; I should as soon expect to find a man, who could speak a language without having studied the words, and surmounted the fatigue and difficulty of pronunciation. The speech of the one

would be a barbarous subject of derision, and unintelligible ; and the notes of the other would be discords destitute of softness and harmony. Such is the absurdity of the man who would become pious, patient, humble, and charitable in one moment, by a simple wish of the soul, without acquiring those virtues by assiduity and care. All the acts of piety which you see him perform, are but emotions proceeding from a heart touched indeed, but not converted. His devotion is a rash zeal, which would usurp the kingdom of heaven, rather than take it by violence. His confession is an avowal extorted by anguish suddenly inflicted by the Almighty, and by remorse of conscience, rather than sacred contrition of heart. His charity is extorted by the fear of death, and the horror of hell. Dissipate these fears, calm that anguish, appease these terrors, and you will see no more zeal, no more charity, no more tears ; his heart habituated to vice, will resume its course. This is the consequence of our first principle ; we shall next examine the result of the second.

We said, that when a habit is once rooted, it becomes difficult to surmount it, and altogether unsurmountable, when suffered to assume too great an ascendancy. This principle suggests a new reflection on the sinner's conduct who delays his conversion ; a very important reflection, which we would wish to impress on the minds of our audience. In the early course of vice, we sin with a power by which we could abstain, were we to use violence ; hence we flatter ourselves, that we shall preserve that power and be able to eradicate vice from the heart when-

soever we shall form the resolution. Wretched philosophy still ; another illusion of self-attachment, a new charm of which the devil avails himself for our destruction. Because, when we have long continued in sin, when we are advanced in age, when reformation has been delayed for a long course of years, vice assumes the sovereignty, and we are no longer our own masters.

You intimate a wish to be converted ; and when do you mean to enter on the work ? To-morrow, without further delay. And are you not very absurd in deferring till to-morrow, when you may begin to-day ? But you shrink on seeing what labour it will cost, what difficulties must be surmounted, what victories must be obtained over yourselves. From this change you divert your eyes : to-day you still wish to follow your course, to abandon your heart to sensible objects, to follow your passions, and gratify your concupiscence. But to-morrow you intimate a wish of recalling your thoughts, of citing your wicked propensities before the bar of God, and pronouncing their sentence. O sophism of self-esteem ! carrying with it its own refutation. For if this wicked propensity, strengthened to a certain point, appears invincible to-day, how shall it be otherwise to-morrow, when to the actions of this day you shall have added those of another ? If this sole idea, if this single thought of labour, induce you to defer to-day, what is to support you to-morrow under the same labour ? Further, there follows a consequence from these reflections, which may appear unheard of to those, who are accustomed to examine

the result of a principle ; but which may perhaps convince those who know how to use their reason, and have some knowledge of human nature. It seems to me, that, since habits are formed by actions, when those habits are continued to an age in which the brain acquires a certain consistency, correction serves merely to interrupt the actions already established.

It would be sufficient in early life, while the brain is yet flexible, and induced by its own texture to lose impressions as readily as it acquired them ; at this age, I say, to quit the action would be sufficient to reform the habit. But when the brain has acquired the degree of consistency already mentioned, the simple suspension of the act is not sufficient to reform the habit ; because by its texture it is disposed to continue the same, and to retain the impressions it has received.

Hence, when a man has lived some time in vice, to quit it is not a sufficient reform ; for him there is but one remedy, that is, to perform actions opposite to those which had formed the habit. Suppose, for instance, that a man shall have lived in avarice for twenty years, and been guilty of ten acts of extortion every day. Suppose he shall afterwards have a desire to reform ; that he shall devote ten years to the work ; that he shall every day do ten acts of charity opposite to those of his avarice ; these ten years (considering the case here according to the course of nature only, for we allow interior and supernatural aids in the conversion of a sinner, as we shall prove in the subsequent discourses,) would they be sufficient per-



fectly to eradicate covetousness from this man? It seems contrary to the most received maxims. You have heard that habits confirmed to a certain degree, and continued to a certain age, are never reformed but by the same number of opposite actions. The character before us, has lived twenty years in the practice of avarice, and but ten in the exercise of charity, and doing only ten acts of benevolence daily during that period; he is then arrived at an age in which he has lost the facility of receiving new impressions. We cannot therefore, I think, affirm that those ten years are adequate perfectly to eradicate the vice from his heart. After all, sinners, you still continue in those habits, aged in crimes, heaping one bad deed upon another, and flattering yourselves to reform, by a wish, by a glance, by a tear, without difficulty or conflict, habits the most inveterate. Such are the reflections suggested by a knowledge of the human frame with regard to the delay of conversion. To this you will oppose various objections which it is of importance to resolve.

You will say, that our principles are contradicted by experience; that we daily see persons, who have long indulged a vicious habit, and who have renounced it at once with repeating the opposite acts of virtue. The fact is possible, it is indeed undeniable. It occurs in five cases, which when fully examined, will be found not at all to invalidate what has already been established.

1. A man possessing the free use of his faculties, may by an effort of reflection extricate himself from a vicious habit, I allow; but we have superseded the

objection by a case apparently applicable. We have cautiously anticipated, and often resumed the solution. We speak of those only, who have attained an advanced age, and have lost the facility of acquiring new dispositions. Have you ever seen persons of sixty or seventy years of age renounce their avarice, their pride, a favourite passion, or a family prejudice?

2. A man placed in a desponding situation, and under an extraordinary stroke of Providence, will instantly reform a habit, I grant; but that does not destroy our principles. We have not included in our reflections those extraordinary visitations which Providence may employ to subdue the sinner. When we said that the reformation of a vicious habit would require a number of acts which have some proportion to those which formed it, we supposed an equality of impressions in those actions, and that each action would be equal to that we wished to destroy.

3. A man may suddenly reform a habit on the reception of new ideas, and on hearing some truths of which he was ignorant before, I also acknowledge; but this proves nothing to the point. We speak of a man born in the bosom of the church, educated in the principles of Christianity, and who has reflected a thousand and a thousand times on the truths of religion; and on whom we have pressed a thousand and a thousand times the motives of repentance and regeneration; but, being now hardened, he can hear nothing new on those subjects.

4. A man may, I allow, on the decay of his faculties, suddenly reform a bad habit; but what has this



to do with the renovation which God requires? In this case, the effect of sin vanishes away, but the principle remains. A particular act of the bad habit is ceded to weakness and necessity, but the source still subsists, and wholly predominates in the man.

. 5. In fine, a man whose life has been a continued warfare between vice and virtue; but with whom vice for the most part has had the ascendancy over virtue, may obtain in his last sickness, the grace of real conversion. There is, however, something doubtful in the case; conversion on a death-bed being difficult or impossible; because between one unconverted man and another there is often a vast difference; the one, if I may so speak, is within a step of the grave, but the other has a vast course to run. The former has subdued his habits, has already made a progress, not indeed so far as to attain, but so far as to approach a state of regeneration: this man may, perhaps, be changed in a moment: but how can he, who has already wasted life in ignorance and vice, effectuate so great a change in a few days, or a few hours? We have therefore proved that the first objection is destitute of force.

You will, however, propose a second: you will say, that this principle proves too much, that if we cannot be saved without a fund and habit of holiness, and if this habit cannot be acquired without perseverance in duty, we exclude from salvation those deeply contrite sinners who having wasted life in vice, have now not sufficient time to form a counterpoise to the force of their criminal habits.

This difficulty naturally occurs ; but the solution we shall give does not so properly accord with this discourse ; it shall be better answered in the exercises which shall follow, when we shall draw our arguments from the Scriptures. We shall then affirm that when a sinner groans under the burden of his corruption, and sincerely desires conversion, God affords his aid, and gives him supernatural power to vanquish his sinful propensities. But we will prove, at the same time, that those aids are so very far from countenancing the delay of conversion, that no consideration can be more intimidating to him who presumes on such a conduct. For, my brethren, our divinity and morality give each other the hand, the one is established upon the other. There is a wise medium between heresy, and I know not what absurd and extravagant orthodoxy ; and as it is a bad maxim to establish the precepts, and renounce the doctrines of Jesus Christ, so it is equally pernicious to make a breach in his precepts, to confirm his doctrines.

The aids of the Holy Spirit, and a consciousness of our own weakness, are the most powerful motives which can prompt us to labour for conversion without delay. If conversion, after a life of vice, depended on yourselves, if your heart were in your own power, if you had sufficient command to sanctify yourselves at pleasure, then you would have some reason for flattery in this delay. But your conversion cannot be effectuated without an extraneous cause, without the aids of the Spirit of God ; aids he will probably withhold, after you shall have despised

ed his grace, and insulted it with obstinacy and malice. On this head therefore, you can form no reasonable hope.

You will draw a third objection from what we have already allowed, that a severe affliction may suddenly transform the heart. To this principle, we shall grant that the prospect of approaching death may make an impression to deceive the sinner : that the veil of corruption raised at the close of life, may induce a man to yield at once to the dictates of conscience, as one walking hastily towards a precipice would start back on removing the fatal bandage which concealed his danger.

On this ground, I would await you, brethren. Is it then on a death-bed, that you formed your hopes ? We will pledge ourselves to prove, that so far from this being the most happy season, it is exactly the reverse. The reflections we shall make on this subject, are much more calculated to strike the mind than those already advanced, because they require some penetration, but you cannot avoid perceiving the force of those which follow.

We will not absolutely deny the possibility of the fact on which the objection is founded. We will allow that a man, who with composure of mind sees the decay of his earthly house, and regards death with attentive eyes, may enter into the requisite dispositions. Death, being considered as near, enables him to know the world, to discover its vanity, emptiness, and total insufficiency. A man who has but a few moments to live, and who sees that his honour, his riches, his titles, his grandeur, and the whole uni-

verse united for his aid, can afford him no consolation: a man so situated knows the vanity of the world better than the greatest philosophers, and the severest anchorets: hence he may detach his heart. We ever hope that the Deity will accept of such a conversion, be satisfied with the sinner, who does not devote himself to virtue, till the occasions of vice are removed, receiving him at the extremities of life: it is certain however, that such a supposition, is so far from favouring the delay of conversion, as to demonstrate its absurdity. How can we presume on what may happen in the hour of death? Of how many difficulties is this illusory scheme susceptible? Shall I die in a bed calm and composed? Shall I have presence and recollection of mind? Shall I avail myself of these circumstances to eradicate vice from the heart, and to establish there the kingdom of righteousness?

For, first, who is there can assure himself he shall die in this situation? To how many disastrous accidents, to how many tragic events are you exposed! Does not every creature, every substance which surrounds us, menace both our health and our life? If your hopes of conversion are founded on a supposition of this kind, you ought to fear the whole universe. Are you in the house? you should fear its giving way, and dissipating by the fall all your expectation. Are you in the open field? you should fear lest, the earth opening, its caverns should swallow you up, and thus elude your hope. Are you on the waters? you should fear to see in every wave a messenger of death, a minister of justice, and an



avenger of your lukewarmness and delay. In so many well-founded fears, what repose can you enjoy? If any one of these accidents should overtake you, say now, what would become of your foolish prudence? Who is it that would study for you the religion you have neglected? Who is it that would shed for you tears of repentance? Who is it that would quench for you the devouring fire, kindled against your crimes, and ready to consume you? Is tragic death a thing unknown? What year elapses undistinguished by visitations of this kind? What campaign is closed without producing innumerable instances?

In the second place, we will suppose that you shall die a natural death. Have you ever seen the dying? Do you presume that we can be in a proper state of thought and reflection, when seized with those presages of death, which announce his approach? When we are seized with those insupportable and piercing pains which take every reflection from the soul? When exposed to those stupors which benumb the brightest and most piercing genius? To those profound lethargies which render unavailing, motives the most powerful, and exhortations the most pathetic? To those frequent reveries which present phantoms and chimeras, and fill the soul with a thousand alarms? My brethren, would we always wish to deceive ourselves? Look, foolish man, on this pale extended corpse, look again on this dying carcass: where is the mind which has fortitude to recollect itself in this deplorable situation,

and to execute the chimerical projects of conversion?

In the third place, we will suppose that you shall be visited by the peculiar favour of Heaven with one of those mild complaints, which conduct imperceptibly to the grave, and unattended with pain; and that you shall be happily disposed for conversion. Are we not daily witnesses of what passes on those occasions? Our friends, our family, our self-esteem, all unite to make us augur a favourable issue, whenever the affliction is not desperate: and not thinking this the time of death, we think also it ought not to be the time of conversion. After having disputed with God the fine days of health, we regret to give him the lucid intervals of our affliction. We would wish him to receive the soul at the precise moment when it hovers on our lips. We hope to recover, and hope inflames desire; the wish to live gives a deeper root to our love of the world; and *the friendship of this world is enmity with God*. Meanwhile the affliction extends itself, the disease takes its course, the body weakens, the spirits droop, and death arrives even before we had scarcely thought that we were mortal.

Fancy yourselves, in short, to die in the most favourable situation, tranquil and composed, without delirium, without stupor, without lethargy. Fancy also, that stripped of prejudice, and the chimerical hope of recovery, you should know that your end is near. I ask whether the single thought, the sole idea, that you should soon die be not capable of depriving you of the composure essential to the work of your salvation? Can a man habituated to dissipation, ac-

customed to care, devoted to its maxims, see without confusion and regret, his designs averted, his hopes frustrated, his schemes subverted, the fashion of the world vanish away, the thrones erected, the books opened, and his soul cited before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge? We have frequent occasion to observe, when attending the sick, that those who suffer the greatest anguish are not always the most distressed about their sins, however deplorable their state may be, their pains so far engross the capacity of the soul, as to obstruct their paying attention to what is most awful, the image of approaching death. But a man who sees himself approaching the grave, and looks on his exit undisturbed with pain; a man who considers death as it really is, suffers sometimes greater anguish than those which can arise from the acutest disease.

What shall I say of the multitude of cares attendant on this fatal hour? He must call in physicians, take advice, and endeavour to support this tottering tabernacle. He must appoint a successor, make a will, bid adieu to the world, weep over his family, embrace his friends, and detach his affections. Is there time then, is there time amid so many afflictive objects, amid so many acute emotions; is there time to examine religion, to review the circumstances of a vanishing life, to restore the wealth illegally acquired, to repair the tarnished reputation of his neighbour, to repent of his sin, to reform his heart, and weigh those distinguished motives which prompt us to holiness? My brethren, when we devote ourselves entirely to the great work; when we employ



all our bodily powers, all our mental faculties ; when we employ the whole of life it is scarcely sufficient, how then can it be done by a busy, wandering, troubled, and departing spirit ? Hence the third difficulty vanishes of its own accord : hence we may maintain as permanent, the principles we have discussed, and the consequences we have deduced.

And we are fully convinced that those who know how to reason will not dispute these principles ; I say, those who know how to reason ; because it is impossible, but among two or three thousand persons, there must be some eccentric minds, who would deny the clearest and most evident truths. If there are among our hearers persons who believe that a man can effectuate conversion by his own strength, it would not be proper for them to reject our principles, and they can have no right to complain. If you are orthodox, as we suppose, you cannot regard as false what we have proved. Our maxims have been founded on the most rigid orthodoxy, on the inability of men, on the necessity of grace, on original corruption, and on the various objections which our most venerable divines have opposed to the system of degenerate casuists. Hence, as I have said, not one of you can claim the right of disputing the doctrines we have taught. Heretics, orthodox, and all the world are obliged to receive them, as they have nothing to object. But we, my brethren, we have many sad and terrific consequences to draw : but at the same time, consequences equally worthy of your regard.

## APPLICATION.

First, you should reduce to practice the observations we have made on conversion, and particularly the reflections we have endeavoured to establish, that in order to be truly regenerate, it is not sufficient to do some partial services for God, love must be the predominant disposition of the heart. This idea ought to correct the notions you entertain of a good life, and a happy death, that you can neither know those things in this world, nor ought you to wish to know them. Those visionaries also who are offended when we press those grand truths of religion, who would disseminate their ridiculous errors in the church, and incessantly cry in our ears, "Christians, take heed to yourselves ; they shake the foundation of faith ; there is poison in the doctrine."

My brethren, were this a subject less serious and grave, nothing would hinder us from ridiculing all scruples of this nature. "Take heed to yourselves for there is poison:" we would press you to love God with all your heart ; we would press you to consecrate to him your whole life ; we would induce you not to defer conversion, but prepare for a happy death by the continual exercise of repentance and piety. Is it not obvious that we ought to be cautious of admitting such a doctrine, and that the church would be in a deplorable condition were all her members *adorned* with those dispositions? But we have said already, that the subject is too grave and serious to admit of pleasantry.

My brethren, *if any one preach to you another gospel than that which has been preached, let him be accursed.* If any one will presume to attack those doctrines which the sacred authors have left in their writings, which your fathers have transmitted, which some of you have sealed with your blood, and nearly all of you with your riches and fortune; if any one presume to attack them; let the doctors refute, let the ecclesiastical sword cut, pierce, excise, and excommunicate at a stroke the presumptuous man. But consider also that the end of all these truths is, to induce mankind to love their Maker. This is so essential, that we make no scruple to say, if there were one among the different Christian sects better calculated to make you holy than our communion, you ought to leave this in order to attach yourselves hereafter to the other. One of the first reasons which should induce us to respect the doctrine of the incarnate God, the inward, immediate, and supernatural aids of the Spirit is, that there is nothing in the world more happily calculated to enforce the obligation of loving God.

Return therefore, from your prejudices, irradiate your minds, and acquire more correct ideas of a holy life, and a happy death. On this subject, we flatter and confuse ourselves, and willingly exclude instruction. We imagine, that provided we have paid during the ordinary course of life, a modified regard to devotion, we have but to submit to the will of God, whose pleasure it is we should leave the world; we imagine that we have worthily fulfilled the duties of life, fought the good fight,

and have nothing to do but to put forth the hand to the crown of righteousness. "There is no fear" say they, "of the death of such a Christian, he was an Israelite indeed, he was an honest man, *he led a good life.*" But what is the import of the words, *he led a moral life?* a phrase as barbarous in the expression as erroneous in the sense; for if they mean any thing, it is, that he has fulfilled the duties of morality. But can you bear this testimony of the man we have now described; of a man who contents himself with avoiding the crimes recounted infamous in the world; but exclusively of that, he has neither fervour, nor zeal, nor patience, nor charity? Is this the man who you say has *led a moral life?* What then is the morality which prescribes so broad a path? It is not the morality of Jesus Christ. The morality of Jesus Christ recommends silence, retirement, detachment from the world. The morality of Jesus Christ requires, that you *be merciful, as God is merciful*; that ye be *perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*. The morality of Jesus Christ requires, that you *love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*: and that if you cannot fully attain to this degree of perfection on earth, you should make continual efforts to approach it. Here you have the prescribed morality of Jesus Christ. But the morality of which you speak, is the morality of the world, the morality of the devil, the morality of hell. Will such a morality enable you to sustain the judgment of God? Will it appease his justice? Will it close the gates of hell? Will it open to you the gates



of immortality ? Ah ! let us form better ideas of religion. There is an infinite distance between him, accounted by the world an honest man, and a real Christian ; and if the love of God have not been the predominant disposition of our heart, let us tremble, let us weep, or rather let us endeavour to reform. This is the first conclusion we deduce from our discourse.

The second turns on what we have said with regard to the force of habits ; on the means of correcting the bad and of acquiring the good. Recollect that all these things cannot be done in a moment ; recollect, that to succeed, we must be fixed and firm, returning a thousand and a thousand times to the charge. We should be the more struck with the propriety of this, if, as we said in the body of this discourse, we should more frequently reflect on ourselves. But most people live destitute of thought and recollection. We are dissipated by exterior things, our eyes glance on every object, we ascend to the heavens to make new discoveries among the stars, we descend into the deep, we dig into the bowels of the earth, we run even from the one to the other world, seeking fortune in the remotest regions, and we are ignorant of what occurs in our own breast. We have a body and a soul, exquisite works of God, and we never reflect on what passes within, how knowledge is acquired, how prejudices originate, how habits are formed and fortified. If this knowledge served merely for intellectual pleasure, we ought at least to tax our indolence with neglect ; but being intimately connected with our salvation, we cannot

here forbear deploring our indifference. Let us therefore study ourselves, and become rational, if we would become regenerate. Let us learn the important truth already proved, that virtue is acquired only by diligence and application.

Nor let it be here objected, that we ought not to talk of Christian virtues as of the other habits of the soul, and that the Holy Spirit can suddenly and fully correct our prejudices, and eradicate our corrupt propensities. Undoubtedly we need his aid.—Yes, O Holy Spirit, source of eternal wisdom, however great may be our efforts and vigilance, whatever endeavors I may use for my salvation, I will never trust to myself, never will I *offer incense to my drag, or sacrifice to my net, never will I lean upon this bruised reed*, never will I view my insufficiency without asking thy support.

But after all, let us not imagine, that the operations of the Holy Spirit are like the fabulous enchantments celebrated in our romances and poets. We have told you a thousand times, and we cannot too often repeat it, that grace never destroys, but perfects nature. The Spirit of God will abundantly irradiate your mind, if you vigorously apply to religious contemplation; but he will not infuse the light, if you disdain the study. The Spirit of God will abundantly establish the reign of grace in your heart, if you assiduously apply to the work; but he will never do it in the midst of dissipation and sin. We ought to endeavour to become genuine Christians, as we endeavour to become profound philosophers, acute mathematicians, able preachers, enlightened merchants,

intrepid commanders, by assiduity and labour, by application and practice.

This is perhaps a galling reflection. I am not astonished that it is calculated to excite in most of you discouragement and fear; here is the most difficult part of our discourse. The doctrines or truths we discuss being unwelcome, and such as you would gladly evade, we must here suspend the thread of this discourse, that you may feel the importance of our ministry. For, after having established these truths, we must form the one or the other of these opinions concerning your conduct,—either that you *seek the Lord while he may be found*; that you endeavour, by a holy obstinacy, to establish truth in the mind and grace in the heart; or that you exclude yourselves from salvation, and engage yourselves so early in the way of destruction, as to occasion fear lest the Spirit of God, a thousand and a thousand times insulted, should for ever withdraw.

What do you say, my bretheren? Which of these opinions is best founded? To what end do you live? Does this unremitting vigilance, this holy obstinacy, this continual recurrence of watchfulness and care, form the object of your life? Ah! make no more problems of a truth, which will shortly be but too well established.

Ministers of Jesus Christ, sent by the God of vengeance, to plant not only, but also to root out, to build, but also to throw down, (Jer. i. 10.) *proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*, (Isaiah xi. 2.) but also to blow the alarming trumpet of Zion in the ears of the people, awaken the conscience, brandish the awful sword of Divine justice, and put in full ef-



fect the most terrific truths of religion. In seasons of prosperity, the gospel supplies us with sweet and consoling passages, but we should now urge the most efficacious; we should not stay to adorn the house of God, when called to extinguish a fire which threatens its destruction. Yes, Christians, did we use concerning many of you, any other language, we should betray the sentiments of our hearts. You suffer the only period, proper for your salvation, to escape. You walk in a dreadful path, *the end thereof is death*, and your way of life tends absolutely to incapacitate you from tasting the sweetness of a happy death.

It is true, if you call in some ministers at the close of life, they will perhaps have the weakness to promise, to the appearance of conversion, that grace which is offered only to a genuine change of heart. But we solemnly declare, that if, after a life of inaction and negligence, they shall speak peace to you on a death bed, you ought not to depend on this kind of promises. They ought to be classed with those things which ought not to be credited, though preached by *an angel of heaven*. Ministers are but men, and weak as others. You call us to attend the dying, who have lived as most of the human kind. There we find a sorrowful family, a father bated in tears, a mother in despair: what would you have us to do? Would you have us speak honestly to the sick man? Would you have us tell him, that a this exterior of repentance is a vain phantom without substance, without reality? That among a thousand sick persons, who seem converted on a death-bed, we scarcely find one who is really chang-

ed? That for one degree of probability of the reality of his conversion, we have a thousand which prove it to be extorted? And to speak without evasion, we presume, that in one hour he will be taken from his dying bed, and cast into the torments of hell? We should—we should apply this last remedy, and no longer trifle with a soul whose destruction is almost inevitable. But you forbid us, you prevent us; you say that such severe language would injure the health of the sick. You do more; you weep, you lament. At a scene so pathetic, we soften as other men: we have not resolution to add one affliction to another; and whether from compassion to the dying, or pity to the living, we talk of heaven, and afford the man hopes of salvation. But we say again, we still declare that all these promises ought to be suspected; they can change neither the spirit of religion, nor the nature of man. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. And those tears which you shed on the approach of death, that extorted submission to the will of God, those hasty resolutions of obedience, are not that holiness. In vain should we address you in other language. You would indeed hear on your dying bed an irreproachable witness always ready to contradict us.—That witness is conscience. In vain does the degenerate minister endeavour to afford the dying illusive hope, conscience speaks without disguise. The preacher says, *Peace, peace*, Jer. vi. 14. Conscience replies, *There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God*, Isaiah lv. 21. The preacher says, *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors*, Psal.

xxiv. 7. Conscience cries, *Mountains, mountains, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, Rev. vi. 16.*

But, O gracious God, what are we doing in this pulpit? Are we come to trouble Israel? Are we sent to curse? Do we preach to-day only of hell, only of devils? Ah! my brethren, there is no attaining salvation but in the way which we have prescribed: it is true, that to the present hour you have neglected: it is true, that the day of vengeance succeeds the day of wrath. But the day of vengeance is not yet come. You yet live, you yet breathe: grace is yet offered. I hear the voice of my Saviour, saying, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. Isa. xl. 1.* I hear the delightful accents crying upon this church, *Grace, grace unto it. Zech. iv. 7. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my relents are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger: I will not return to destroy Ephraim. Hos. xi. 8, 9.*—It speaks peculiarly to you young people, whose minds are yet free from passion and prejudice, whose chaste hearts have not yet been corrupted by this world. You are now precisely at the age for salvation; you have all the necessary dispositions for the study of religious truths, and the subjugation of your hearts to its laws. What penetration, what perception, what vivacity, and consequently what preparation for receiving the yoke of Christ. Che-

rich those dispositions, and improve each moment of a period so precious. *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* Eccles. xii. 1. Alas, with all your acuteness you will have enough to do in surmounting the wicked propensities of your heart. And would not the force of habit exceedingly augment the depravity of nature, should you continue in vice?

And you aged men, who have already run your course, but who have devoted the best of your days to the world: you who seek the Lord to-day, groping your way, and who are making faint efforts in age to withdraw from the world a heart of which it has possession: what shall we say to you? Shall we say that your ruin is without remedy, that your sentence is already pronounced, that nothing now remains but to cast you headlong into the abyss you have willingly prepared for yourselves? God forbid that we should thus become the executioners of Divine vengeance. We address you in the voice of our prophet, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.* Weep at the remembrance of your past lives, tremble at the thought, that God sends strong delusions on those that *obey not the truth.* Oh! happy docility of my youth, whither art thou fled? Ah! soul more burthened with corruption than with the weight of years; Ah! stupidity, prejudice, fatal dominion of sin, you are the fatal recompence I have derived from serving the enemy of my salvation.

But, while you fear, hope: and hoping, act: at least, O! at least devote the span of life, which God may add, to your salvation. You have abundantly



more to do than others ; your task is greater, and your time is shorter. You have, according to the prophet, *to turn your feet unto the testimonies of the Lord.* Psalm cxix. 59. You have to swim against the stream, to *enter in at the straight gate.* Above all,—above all, offer up fervent prayers to God. Perhaps, moved by your tears, he will revoke the sentence ; perhaps excited to compassion by your misery, he will heal it by his grace ; perhaps, surmounting by the supernatural operations of the Spirit, the depravity of nature, he will give you thoughts so divine, and sentiments so tender, that you shall suddenly be transformed into new men.

To the utmost of our power, let us reform. There is yet time, but that time is perhaps more limited than we think. After all, why delay ? Ah ! I well see what obstructs. You regard conversion as a tedious task, and the state of regeneration as difficult and burdensome, which must be entered into as late as possible. But if you knew—if you knew *the gift of God !* If you knew the sweetness felt by a man who seeks God in his ordinances, who hears his oracles, who derives light and truth from their source. If you knew the joy of a man transformed into the image of his Maker, and who daily engraves on his heart some new trait of the all-perfect being. If you knew the consolation of a Christian, who seeks his God in prayer, who mingles his voice with the voice of angels, and begins on earth the sacred exercises which shall one day constitute his eternal felicity ! If you knew the joys which succeed the bitterness of repentance, when the sinner, returning from his

folly, prostrates himself at the feet of a merciful God, and receives at the throne of grace, from the Saviour of the world, the discharge of all their sins, and mingling tears of joy with tears of grief, repairs by redoubled affection, his lukewarmness and indolence. If you knew the raptures of a soul persuaded of its salvation, which places all its hope within the veil, as an anchor sure and steadfast, which bids defiance to hell and the devil, which anticipates the celestial delights, *which is already justified, already risen, already glorified, already seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* Heb. vi. 19. Eph. ii. 6.

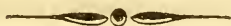
Ah ! why should we defer so glorious a task ? We ought to defer things which are painful and injurious, and when we cannot extricate ourselves from a great calamity, we ought at least to retard it as much as possible. But this peace, this tranquility, these transports, this resurrection, this foretaste of paradise, are they to be arranged in this class ? Ah, no ! I will no longer delay, O my God, to keep thy commandments, I will *reach forth*, I will *press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling.* Phil. iii. 10. Happy to have formed such noble resolutions ! Happy to accomplish them ! Amen. To God the Father, Son and Spirit, be honor and glory for ever. Amen.





## SERMON II.

*On the Delay of Conversion.*



ISAIAH IV. 6.

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

[THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.]

**I**T is now some time my brethren, if you recollect, since we addressed you on this subject. We proposed to be less scrupulous in discussing the terms than desirous to attack the delay of conversion, and absurd notions of divine mercy. We then apprized you, that we should draw our reflections from three sources—from man—from scripture—and from experience. We began by the first of these points; to-day we intend to discuss the second; and if Providence call us again into this pulpit, we will explain the third, and give the finishing hand to the subject.

If you were attentive to what we proposed in our first discourse, if the love of salvation drew you to these assemblies, you would derive instruction. You would sensibly perceive the vain pretensions of those who would indeed labour to obtain salvation, but who always delay. For what, I pray, is more proper to excite alarm and terror in the soul, negligent of conversion, than the single point to which we

called your attention, the study of man ? What is more proper to confound such a man, than to tell him, as we then did : your brain will weaken with age ; your mind will be filled with notions foreign to religion ; it will lose with years, the power of conversing with any but sensible objects ; and of commencing the investigation of religious truths ? What is more proper to save such a man from his prejudices, than to remind him, that the way, and the only way of acquiring a habit is practice ; that virtue cannot be formed in the heart by a single wish, by a rash and hasty resolution, but by repeated and persevering efforts ; that the habit of a vice strengthens itself in proportion as we indulge the crime ? What, in short, is more proper to induce us to improve the time of health for salvation, than to lay before him the portait we have drawn of a dying man, stretched on a bed of affliction, labouring with sickness, troubled with phantoms and reveries, flattered by his friends, terrified with death, and consequently incapable of executing the work he has deferred to this tragic period ? I again repeat, my brethren, if you were attentive to the discourse we delivered, if the desire of salvation drew you to these assemblies, there is not one among you, whom those serious reflections would not constrain to enter into his heart, and to reform without delay the purposes of life.

But it may appear to some, that we narrow the way to heaven ; that the doctrines of faith being above the doctrines of philosophy, we must suppress the light of reason, and take solely for our

guide in the paths of piety, the lamp of revelation. We will endeavor to afford them satisfaction : we will shew that religion, very far from weakening, strengthens the reflections which reason has suggested. We will prove, that we have said nothing but what ought to alarm those who delay conversion, and who found the notion they have formed of the Divine mercy, not on the nature of God, but on the depraved propensity of their heart, and on the impure system of their lusts. These are the heads of this discourse.

You will tell us, brethren, entering on this discourse, that we are little afraid of the difficulties of which perhaps it is susceptible ; we hope that the truth, notwithstanding our weakness, will appear in all its lustre. But other thoughts strike our mind, and they must for a moment arrest our course. We fear the difficulty of your hearts : we fear more : we fear that this discourse, which shall disclose the treasures of grace, will aggravate the condemnation of those who turn it into wantonness : we fear that this discourse, by the abuse to which many may expose it, will serve merely as a proof of the truths already established. O God ! avert this dreadful prediction, and may the cords of love, which thou so evidently employest, draw and captivate our hearts. Amen.

I. The Holy Scriptures to-day are the source from which we draw our arguments to attack the delay of conversion. Had we no design but to cite what is positively said on this subject, our meditation would require no great efforts. We should have but to transcribe a mass of infallible decisions, of repeated

warnings, of terrific examples, of appalling menaces, with which they abound, and which they address to all those who daringly delay conversion. We should have to repeat this caution of the prophet, *To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts*, Psalm xciv. 7. A caution he has sanctified by his own example, *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*. Psal. cxix. 60. We should have only to address to you this reflection, made by the author of the second book of Chronicles: *The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees who slew the young men with the sword. And had no compassion upon young men or maidens, old men or him that stooped for age. They burned the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all the palaces thereof with fire*, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, &c. We should only have to propose the declaration of Eternal Wisdom, *Because I called and ye refused, I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh*, Prov. i. 26. We should have but to represent the affecting scene of Jesus Christ weeping over Jerusalem, and saying, *O that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes*, Luke xix. 41. We should have but to say to each of you as St. Paul to the Romans: *Despise thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not*



*knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgments of God, Rom. ii. 4, &c. And elsewhere that God sends strong delusion on those who believe not the truth, to believe a lie, 2 Thess. ii. 8. We should have but to resound in this assembly, those awful words in the Epistle to the Hebrews : If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and the fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. Heb. x. 26. For if the mercy of God is without bounds, if it is ready to receive the sinner the moment he is induced by the fear of punishment to prostrate himself before him, why is the present day marked as the precise period to hear his voice? Why this haste? Why are resources and remedies exhausted? Why this strong delusion? Why this refusal to hear the tardy penitent? Why this end of the days of Jerusalem's visitation? Why these treasures of wrath? Why this defect of sacrifice for sin? All these passages, my brethren, are as so many sentences against our delays, against the contradictory notions we fondly form of the divine mercy, and of which we foolishly avail ourselves in order to sleep in our sins.*

All these things being hereby evident and clear; they require no farther explication. Let us proceed with our discourse. When we employed our philosophical arguments against the delay of conver-



sion ; when we proved from the force of habits, that it is difficult, not to say impossible, for a man aged in crimes, to be converted at the hour of death ; it appeared to you, that we shook two doctrines which are fundamental pillars of faith.

The first is the supernatural aids of the Holy Spirit, promised in the new covenant ; aids which bend the most rebellious wills, aids which can surmount in a moment all the difficulties which the force of habit can oppose to conversion.

The second doctrine, is that of mercy, access to which being opened by the blood of Christ, there is no period it seems but we may be admitted whenever we come, though at the close of life. Here is, in substance, if I mistake not, all that religion and the scriptures seem to oppose to what has been advanced in our first discourse. If we make it therefore evident, that these two doctrines do not oppose our principles ; if we prove, that they contain nothing directly repugnant to the conclusions we have drawn, shall we not thereby demonstrate, that the Scriptures contain nothing but what should alarm those who trust to a tardy repentance. This we undertake to develope. The subject is not without difficulty ; we have to steer between two rocks equally dangerous : for if, on the one hand, we should supersede those doctrines, we abjure the faith of our fathers, and draw upon ourselves the charge of heterodoxy. On the other hand, if we should stretch those doctrines beyond a certain point, we furnish a plea for licentiousness : we sap what we have built, and refute

ourselves. Both these rocks we must cautiously avoid.

The first proofs of which people avail themselves, to excuse their negligence and delay, and the first arguments of defence, which they draw from the Scriptures, in order to oppose us, are taken from the aids of the Spirit, promised in the new covenant. “Why those alarming sermons?” say they. “Why those awful addresses to the man, who merely defers his conversion? Why confound, in this way, religious with natural habits?” The latter are formed, I grant, by labour and study; by persevering and uninterrupted assiduity. The former proceed from extraneous aids; they are the productions of grace, formed in the soul by the Holy Spirit. I will not, therefore, invalidate a doctrine so consolatory; I will profit by the prerogatives of Christianity; I will devote my life to the world; and when I perceive myself ready to expire, I will assume the character of a Christian. I will surrender myself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and then he shall, according to his promise, communicate his powerful influence to my heart; he shall subdue my wicked propensities, eradicate my most inveterate habits, and effectuate, in a moment, what would have cost me so much labour and pain. Here is an objection, which most sinners have not the effrontery to mention, but which a false theology infuses into too many minds; and on which we found nearly the whole of our imaginary hopes of a death-bed conversion.

To this objection we must reply. We shall manifest its absurdity, 1. By the ministry God has esta-

blished in the church. 2. By the efforts he requires us to make, previously to our presuming that we have received the Holy Spirit. 3. By the manner in which he requires us to co-operate with the Spirit, when we have received him. 4. By the punishments he has denounced against those who resist his work. 5. By the conclusions which the Scripture itself deduces from our natural weakness, and from the necessity of grace. Here, my brethren, are five sources of reflection, which will demonstrate, that every man who draws consequences from the promised aids of the Spirit, to live in lukewarmness, and to flatter himself with acquiring, without labour, without difficulty, without application, habits of holiness, offers violence to religion, and is unacquainted with the genius of the Holy Spirit's economy.

The ministry established in the church, is the first proof that the aids of the Spirit give no countenance to lukewarmness, and the delay of conversion. Had it been the design of the Holy Spirit to communicate knowledge, without the fatigue of religious instruction; had it been his design to sanctify, in a moment, without requiring our co-operation in this great work, why establish a ministry in the church? Why require us in infancy to be taught *line upon line, and precept upon precept*, as Isaiah expresses himself? Isa. xxxviii. 10. Why, as St. Paul says, require us afterward to *leave the principles of the doctrines of Christ, and go on to perfection*? Heb. vi. 1. Why require, as the same apostle says, that we proceed from *milk to strong meat*? 1 Cor. iii. 2. Why require to propose motives, and address exhortations?

Why are we not enlightened and sanctified without means, without ministers, without the Bible, without the ministry? Why act exactly in the science of salvation, as in the sciences of men? For, when we teach a science to a man, we adapt it to his capacity, to his genius, and to his memory; so God requires us to do with regard to men. *Faith comes by hearing, says St. Paul, and hearing by the word.* Rom. x. 17. *Being ascended up on high, he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry (mark the expression,) for the edifying of the body of Christ,* Eph. iv. 11, 12. Perceive you not, therefore, the impropriety of your pretensions? Seeing it has been God's good pleasure to establish a ministry, do you not conceive that he would have you regard it with deference? Seeing he has opened the gates of these temples, do you not conceive that he requires you to enter his courts? Seeing he has enjoined us to preach, do you not conceive that he requires you to hear? Seeing he requires you to hear, do you not conceive that he likewise requires you to comprehend? Seeing he commands us to impress you with motives, would he not have you feel their force? Do you think he has other objects in view? Can you produce a man, who has lived eighty years without meditation and piety, and who has instantaneously become a good divine, a faithful Christian, perfected in holiness and piety? Do you not perceive, on the contrary, that the youth who learns his catechism with care, becomes a good catechumen; that the candidate who profoundly



studies divinity, becomes an able divine ; and that the Christian, who endeavours to subdue his passions, obtains the victory over himself ? Hence the Holy Spirit requires you to use exertions. Hence when we exhorted you to become genuine Christians, with the same application that we endeavour to become enlightened merchants, meritorious officers, acute mathematicians, and good preachers, by assiduity and study, by labour and application, we advanced nothing inconsistent with the genius of our religion. Hence, he who draws from the aids of the Holy Spirit conclusions to remain inactive, and defer the work of salvation, offers violence to the economy of grace, and supersedes the design of the ministry God has established in his church. This is our first reflection.

We have marked, secondly, the efforts that God requires us to use to obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit, even when we do not account ourselves to have received him. He has uniformly required us, at least, to ask his aid. The Scriptures are very express. *Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened.* Matt. vii. 7. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.* Jam. i. 5. And, if we are required to ask, we are also obliged to use efforts, however weak and imperfect, to obtain the grace we ask. For, with what face can we ask God to assist us in the work of salvation, when we deliberately seek our own destruction ? With what face can we ask God not to lead us into temptation, when we go ourselves in pursuit of temptation, and greedily riot in sin ? With what

face can we ask him to extinguish the fire of concupiscence, when we daily converse with objects which inflame it ?

We ought, therefore, to conduct ourselves, with regard to the work of salvation, as we do with regard to life and health. In vain should we try to preserve them, did not God extend his care : Nature, and the elements, conspire for our destruction ; we should vanish of our own accord : God alone can retain the breath which preserves our life. Asa king of Israel was blamed for having had recourse to physicians, without having first inquired of the Lord. But should we not be fools, if from a notion that God alone can preserve our health, we should cast ourselves into a pit ; abandon ourselves to the waves, take no food when healthy, and no medicine when sick ? Thus, in the work of salvation, we should do the same ; imploring the grace of God to aid our endeavours. We should follow the example of Moses, when attacked by Amalek ; he shared with Joshua the task of victory. Moses ascended the hill, Joshua descended into the plain : Joshua fought, Moses prayed : Moses raised his suppliant hands to heaven, Joshua raised a warrior's arm : Moses opposed his fervour to the wrath of heaven, Joshua opposed his courage and arms to the enemy of Israel : and, by this judicious concurrence of praying and fighting, Israel triumphed and Amalek fled.

Observe, thirdly, the manner in which the Holy Spirit requires correspondent co-operation from us, as the objects of his care. In displaying his efficacy in the heart, he pretends not to deal with us as with



stocks and stones. It is an excellent sentence of Augustine: "God, who made us without our choice, will not save us without our consent." Hence the Scripture commonly joins these two things, the work of God in our conversion, and the correspondent duty of man. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice,* here is the work of God, *harden not your hearts.* Ps. xcv. 8. Here is the duty of man. *You are sealed by the Holy Spirit.* Eph. iv. 30. Here is the work of God. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit.* Here is the duty of man. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock.* Rev. v. 20. Here is the work of God. *If any man hear my voice and open.* Here is the duty of man. *God worketh in us to will and to do.* Phil. ii. 12. Here is the work of God. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* Here is the duty of man. *I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.* Ezek. xi. 19. Here is the work of God. *Make you a new heart, and a new spirit.* Ezek. xviii. 31. Here, the duty of man. What avail all these expressions, if it were the design of Scripture in promising grace to our lukewarmness and delay of conversion? What are the duties it prescribes, except they be those very duties, the necessity of which we have proved, when speaking of habits? What is this caution, not to harden the heart against the voice of God, if it is not to pay deference to all he commands? What is it to open to God, who knocks at the door of our heart, if it is not to hear when he speaks, to come when he calls, to yield when he intreats, to tremble when he threatens, and to hope when he promises? What is

this working out our salvation with fear and trembling, if it is not to have this continual vigilance, this salutary caution, this weighty care, the necessity of which we have proved ?

Our fourth reflection is derived from the threatenings, which God denounces against those who refuse to co-operate with the economy of grace. The Spirit of God, you say, will be stronger than your obstinacy ; he will surmount your propensities ; he will triumph over your opposition ; grace will become victorious, and save you, in defiance of nature.—Nay rather this grace shall be withdrawn, if you persist in your contempt of it. Nay, rather this spirit shall abandon you, after a course of obstinacy, to your own way. He resumes the one talent from the unfaithful servant, who neglects to improve it ; and, according to the passage already cited, God sends on those, who obey not the truth, strong delusion to believe a lie. 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11. Hence St. Paul draws this conclusion : *Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle.* And elsewhere it is said, *That servant who knew his lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* Luke xii. 47. And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms, *That it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.* Heb. ii. 4. I am aware that the apostle had particularly in view the sin of those Jews who had embraced the gospel, and abjured it through apostacy or prejudice. We ought, however, to deduce this conclusion, that when the Holy Spirit has enabled us to attain a certain degree

of light and purity, if we relapse into vice, we cease to be the objects of his regard.

5. But why this mass of various arguments, to show the absurdity of the sinner, who excuses himself on the ground of weakness, and indolently awaits the operations of grace? We have a shorter way to confound and resolve the sophism, adduced by his depravity. Let us open the sacred books; let us see what conclusions the Scriptures draw from the doctrine of human weakness, and the promised aids of grace. If these consequences coincide with yours, we give up the cause; but, if they clash, you ought to perceive your error. Show us a single passage in which the Scriptures, having asserted the weakness of men, and the aids of the Holy Spirit, conclude from these maxims, that you ought to continue in indolence. Is it not evident, on the contrary, that they draw conclusions directly opposite? Among many passages, I will select two: the one is a caution of Jesus Christ, the other an argument of St. Paul. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Mark xiii. 33. This is the caution of Christ. *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do.* Phil. ii. 12, 13. This is the argument of St. Paul. Had we advanced a sophism, when, after having established the frailty of human nature, and the necessity of grace, we founded, on those very doctrines, the motives which ought to induce you to diligence, and prompt you to vigilance; it was a sophism, for which the Scriptures are responsible. *The spirit is willing,*

*but the flesh is weak* : here is the principle of Jesus Christ. *God worketh in you to will and to do* : here is the principle of St. Paul. *Work out your salvation* : here is the consequence. Are you, therefore, actuated by a spirit of orthodoxy and truth, when you exclaim against our sermons? Are you then more orthodox than the Holy Ghost, or more correct than eternal truth? Or rather, whence is it that you being orthodox in the first member of the proposition of our authors, become heretics in the second? Why orthodox in the principle, and heretics in the consequence?

Collect now, my brethren, the whole of these five arguments; open your eyes to the light, communicated from all points, in order to correct your prejudice; and see how superficial is the man who draws from human weakness, and the aids of the Spirit, motives to defer his conversion. The Holy Spirit works within us, it is true; but he works in concurrence with the word and the ministry, in sending you pastors, in accompanying their word with wisdom, their exhortation with unction, their weakness with power: and you, who have never read this word, who have absented yourselves from this ministry, who have not wished to hear these discourses, who pay no deference to these cautions, nor submission to this power, would you have the Holy Spirit to convert you by means unknown, and beyond the limits of his operations? The Holy Spirit works within us, it is true: but he requires that we seek and ask those aids, making efforts, imperfect efforts, to sanctify ourselves: and would you wish him to convert you,



while you neglect to seek, while you disdain to ask ; to say the least, while you give up yourselves to inaction and supineness ? The Holy Spirit works within us, it is true ; but he requires that we act in concert with his grace, that we second his operations, and yield to his intreaties : and would you wish him to convert you, while you harden yourselves against his voice, while you never cease from grieving him ? The Holy Spirit works within us, it is true ; but he declares that, if we obstinately resist, he will leave us to ourselves ; he will refuse the aids he has offered in vain ; he will abandon us to our natural stupidity and corruption ; and you, already come to the crisis of vengeance, to the epoch for accomplishing his wrath, to the termination of a criminal career, can you presume that this Spirit will adopt for you a new economy, and work a miracle in your favour ? The Holy Spirit works within us, it is true ; but thence it is concluded in our scriptures, that we ought to work, that we ought to labour, that we ought to apply to the concerns of salvation our strength of body, our facility of conception, our retention of memory, our presence of mind, our vivacity of genius : and you who devote this mind, this genius, this memory, this conception, this health, wholly to the world, do you derive from these very sermons sanction for an indolence and a delay, which the very idea of those talents ought to correct ? If this be not wresting the Scriptures, if this be not offering violence to religion, and subverting the design of the Spirit in the discovery of our natural



weakness, and the promised aids of grace, we must be proof against the most palpable demonstration.

Enough, I think, has been said, to establish our first proposition, that the aids of God's Spirit are founded on the necessity of discharging the offices of piety, in order to acquire the habit ; and that the difficulties adduced, are all converted into proofs, in favour of what they seemed to destroy. Thus also, according to us, pure divinity, and sacred truth, ought to resound in our Protestant auditories. Happy, indeed, were the doctors, if, instead of multiplying questions and disputations, they had endeavoured to press these important truths. O, my soul, lose not thyself in abstract and knotty speculations ; fathom not the mysterious means, which God adopts to penetrate the heart. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* John iii. 8. *Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Prov. xvi. 18. *Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility,* xviii. 12. Content thyself with adoring the goodness of God, who promises thee assistance, and deigns to surmount, by grace, the corruptions of nature. But, while thou groanest under a sense of corruption, endeavour to surmount and vanquish thyself ; draw from God's promises, motives for thy own sanctification and instruction ; and even when thou sayest, I am nothing, I can do nothing, act as though the whole depended on thyself, and as though thou couldst "do all things."

II. The notion of the aids of the Holy Spirit, was the first source of illusion we have had to attack. The notion of the mercy of God is a second, on which we shall also proceed to reflect. "God is merciful," say they ; "the covenant he has established with man, is a covenant of grace: we are not come to the darkness, to the devouring fire, and the tempest. A general amnesty is granted to every sinner. Hence, though our conversion be defective, God will receive our dying breath, and yield to our tears. What, then, should deter us from giving free scope to our passions, and deferring the rigorous duties of conversion, till we are nothing worth for the world?"

Strange argument! Detestable sophism, my brethren! Here is the highest stage of corruption, the supreme degree of ingratitude. What do I say? For though a man be ungrateful, he discovers sensibility and acknowledgment, for the moment at least, on the reception of a favour. Forgetfulness and ingratitude are occasioned by other objects, which time and the world have presented to the mind, and which have obliterated the recollection of past favours. But behold, in the argument of the sinner, an expectation of a novel kind; he acquires the unhappy art of embracing, in the bosom of his ingratitude, the present and the future; the favours already received, and those which are yet to come. "I will be ungrateful beforehand. I will, from this instant, forget the favours I have not as yet received. In each of my acts of vice, I will recollect and anticipate the favours which God shall one day give; and I will derive, from this consideration a fresh motive

to confirm myself in revolt, and to sin with the greater assurance." Is not this extreme of corruption, and ingratitude the most detestable?

But it is not sufficient to attack this system by arguments of equity and decency; this would be to make of man a portrait too flattering, by inducing him to believe that he is sensible of such noble motives. This would affect the wicked little more than saying, you are very ungrateful if you persist in vice. The author of our religion knew the human heart too well, to leave it unopposed by the strongest banks. Let us extend the hypothesis, and demonstrate, that those who reason thus build upon false principles; relying on mercy, to which they have no possible claim. Hence, to find a compassionate God, they must *seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.*

Here a scholastic method, and a series of questions discussed in the schools, would perhaps be acceptable, did we address an auditory of learned doctors, ready to oppose us with their arguments and proofs. But we will not disturb the repose of these disputes and controversies; we will reduce all we have to advance to terms the most plain, and questions the most simple, and ask two things—Is the mercy of God offered you in the Gospel, offered absolutely without conditions? And if it have prescribed conditions, are they of a nature, to which you can instantaneously conform on a death-bed, after having run a criminal career? Here is a second question.

On the idea you may form of these questions will depend the opinion you ought to have of the man,

who claims admission to the throne of mercy, after a dissipated life. For if the Gospel is a definitive covenant, requiring nothing of man; or if its requisitions are so easy, that a wish, a tear, a superficial repentance, a slight recourse to piety, is sufficient, your argument is demonstrative, and our morality is too severe. Profit by a religion so accommodating; cease to anticipate an awful futurity; and reduce the whole Gospel to mere request for grace. But, if the Gospel is a conditional covenant; and if the conditions, on which grace is offered, are of a nature that require time, labour, and application; and if the conditions become impracticable, when too long deferred, then your argument is false, and your conduct altogether absurd.

Now, my brethren, I appeal to the conscience of the most profligate sinners, and to casuists minutely scrupulous. Can they rationally hesitate to decide on the two questions? And will it be difficult to prove, on the one hand, that the Gospel, in offering mercy, imposes certain duties; and, on the other, that we reduce ourselves to an evident incapacity of compliance, when conformity is deferred?

I. Say that the Gospel is a definitive covenant, and you save us the trouble of attacking and refuting an assertion which contradicts itself; for the very term covenant, implies a mutual contract between two parties; otherwise it would overturn a thousand express testimonies of Scripture, which we avoid reciting, because we presume they are well known to our audience.

II. The whole question then is reduced to this, to know what are the stipulated conditions? We are all agreed as to the terms. This condition is a disposition of the soul, which the Scriptures sometimes call *faith*, and sometimes *repentance*. Not to dwell on terms, we ask, what is this *faith*, and what is this *repentance*, which opens access to the throne of grace? In what do these virtues consist? Is the whole implied in a simple desire to be saved? In a mere desire to participate in the benefits of the passion of Jesus Christ? Or, if *faith* and *repentance* include, in their nature, the renunciation of the world, the forsaking of sin, a renovation of life, an inward disposition, inducing us to accept all the benefits procured by the cross of Christ, does it prompt us sincerely to detest the crimes which nailed him to it? In a word, is it sufficient for the penitent to say on a death-bed, "I desire to be saved; I acknowledge that my Redeemer has died for my sins;" Or must he subjoin to these confessions, sentiments proportioned to the sanctity of the salvation which he demands; and eradicate the crimes, for which Jesus Christ has made atonement?

I confess, my brethren, that I discuss these subjects with regret. I fear that those of other communions, who may be present in this assembly, will be offended at this discourse; and publish, to the shame of the reformed churches, that it is still a disputable point with us, whether the renunciation of vice, and adherence to virtue, ought to be included in the notions of faith, and in the conditions we prescribe to penitents. *Tell it not in Gath, publish it*



*not in Askdon.* 2 Sam. i. 20. There are ignorant persons in every society: we have them also in our communion. There are members in each denomination, who would subvert the most generally received principles of their profession: we have also persons of this description. We have ignorant and degenerate Protestants, who presume to entertain those relaxed notions of faith and repentance.

A real Protestant believes with our sacred authors, that *he who confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy.* Prov. xxviii. 13. *That with God there is forgiveness, that he may be feared.* Psalm cxxx. 4. *That God will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again unto folly,* Psalm lxxxv. 8. A good Protestant believes, that *faith, without works, is dead; that it worketh by love; and that we are justified by works.* Jam. ii. 21—26. A good Protestant believes, that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand, in order that men may bring forth fruits meet for repentance.* Matt. iii. 3. 3. A good Protestant believes, that *there is no condemnation to those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* Rom. viii. 1, 2. *That sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace.* Rom. vi. 14. A good Protestant believes, that *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord: that neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall enter the kingdom of God.* 1 Cor. vi. 8, 9.

If this were not the true definition of faith and repentance; if faith and repentance were a mere

wish to participate of the merits of Jesus Christ ; if, in order to salvation, we had but to ask grace, without subduing the corruptions of the heart, what would the Gospel be ? I will venture to affirm, it would be the most impure of all religions ; it would be a monstrous economy ; it would be an invitation to crimes ; it would subvert the law of nature. Under this supposition, the basest of men might have claims of mercy ; the laws of God might be violated with impunity : Jesus Christ would not have descended from heaven, to save us from our sins, but to console us in the commission of crimes. A heathen, excluded from the covenant of grace, might be checked in his riot, by fears of the most tremendous punishment : a Christian, on the contrary, might be the more encouraged to continue in sin, by the notion of a mercy ever ready to receive him. And you, Celsus, you Porphyry, you Zosimus, you Julian, celebrated enemies of the Christian name, who calumniated the infant church, who so frequently accused the first Christians with authorising licentiousness, you had reason to complain, and we have nothing to reply. So many are the reflections, so many the proofs, that the faith and repentance, without which we can find no access to the throne of grace in a dying hour, consist not in a simple desire to be saved, in a superficial recourse to the merits of Jesus Christ ; they include, in their notion, the renunciation of the world, the abandoning of our crimes, and the renovation of heart, of which we have just spoken ; and, without this faith, there is no grace, no mercy, no salvation.

I know that there are growing conversions ; that faith has degrees, that piety has a beginning, that a Christian has his infancy ; and that, at the tribunal of a merciful God, the sincerity of our repentance will be accepted, though imperfect. But would you call that a growing conversion, would you denominate that faith, would you take that for repentance, which is the remorse of a conscience alarmed, not by abhorrence of sin, but the fear of punishment ; not by a principle of divine love, but a principle of self-love ; not by a desire to be united to God, but by horror, excited by the idea of approaching death, and the image of devouring fire ? Farther, is it not true, that to what degree soever we may carry evangelical condescension, it is always evident, that faith and repentance include, in their notion, the principles, at least, of detachment from the world, of renunciation of vice, and the renovation of heart, the necessity of which we have pressed.

This being established, it seems to me that truth is triumphant ; having proved how little ground a man, who delays conversion, has to rely on the mercy of God, and expect salvation. For, after having lived in negligence, by what unknown secret would you form in the soul the repentance and faith we have described, without which, access to the mercy of God is excluded ? Whence would you derive these virtues ? From your own strength, or from the operations of the Holy Spirit ? Do you say from your own strength ? Then what becomes of your orthodoxy ? What becomes of the doctrine of human weakness, and of the necessity of grace ; of which pretext you

would avail yourselves to defer conversion? Do you not perceive how you destroy your own principles, and sap, with one hand, what you build with the other?

We conclude, that nothing is so suspicious as a tardy repentance; that nothing is so unwise as the delay of conversion. We farther conclude, that, in order to receive the aids of grace, we must live in continual vigilance; in order to become the objects of mercy, we must have both repentance and faith; and the only sure tests of having these virtues, is a long course of pious offices. In the ordinary course of religion, without a miracle of mercy, a man who has wasted his life in sin, whatever sighs he may send to heaven at the hour of death, has cause to fear that all access to mercy will be cut off.

All these things appear very clear, my brethren; nevertheless, the wicked love to deceive themselves; they affect rationally to believe the things, of which they are only persuaded by caprice; and they start objections, which it is of importance to resolve; with this view we proceed to apply the whole of this discourse.

#### APPLICATION.

We find people who readily say, that they cannot comprehend these things; that they cannot imagine the justice of God to be so severe as we have insisted; and the conditions of the new covenant to be so rigorous as we have affirmed.

What are the whole of these objections but suppositions without foundation, and frivolous conjectures? "There is but an appearance: I cannot imagine: I cannot conceive." Would you, on suppositions of this nature, risk your reputation, your honour, your fortune, your life? Why, then, risk your salvation?

The justice of God is, perhaps, not so rigorous, you say, as we have affirmed. It is true, that it may be so. If God have, by himself, some covenant of grace not yet revealed; if he should have some new gospel; if God have prepared some other sacrifice, your conjectures may be right. But if *there is no name under heaven whereby we can be saved, but that of our Jesus*, Acts iv. 12.; if there is no other blood than that shed by this divine Saviour; if *God shall judge the world according to my gospel*, Rom. ii. 16.; then your arguments fail, and your salvation is hopeless.

Farther, what sort of reasoning is this? "There is but an appearance: I cannot conceive: I cannot imagine." And who are you that reason in this way? Are you Christians? Where then is that faith, which ought to subjugate reason to the decision of revelation, and which admits the most abstract doctrines, and the most sublime mysteries? If you are allowed to talk in this way, to reply when God hath spoken, to argue when he hath decided, let us establish a new religion; let us place reason on the throne, and make faith retire. The doctrine of the Trinity obstructs my thought, the atonement confounds me, the incarnation presents precipices to me, in which



my reason is absorbed. If you are disposed to doubt of the doctrines we have advanced, under a pretext that you cannot comprehend them, then discard the other doctrines; they are not less incomprehensible.

I will go farther still; I will venture to affirm, that if reason must be consulted on the portrait we have drawn of God's justice, it perfectly accords with revelation. Thou canst not conceive how justice should be so rigorous; and I cannot conceive how it should be so indulgent. I cannot conceive how the Lord of the Universe should be clothed with human flesh, should expose himself to an infuriated populace, and expire on a cross: this is the greatest difficulty I find in the Gospel. But be thou silent, imperious reason; here is a satisfactory solution. Join the difficulty which thou findest in the administration of justice, with that which proceeds from thy notion of mercy; the one will correct the other. The superabundance of mercy will rectify the severity of justice; for the severity of justice proceeds from the superabundance of mercy.

If the people who talk in this manner; if the people who find the divine justice too severe; if they were a people diligently labouring to promote their own salvation; if they devoted an hour daily to the work, the difficulty would be plausible, and they would have apparent cause of complaint. But who are these complainers? They are a people who give full indulgence to their passions; who glory in their infamous intrigues; who are implacable in hating their neighbour, and resolved to hate him during life:

they are votaries of pleasure, who spend half the night in gaming, in drunkenness, in theatres, and take from the day the part of the night they have devoted to dissipation: they are proud, ambitious men who under a pretext of having sumptuous equipage, and dignified titles, fancy themselves authorised to violate the obligations of Christianity with impunity. These are the people, who, when told if they persist in this way of life, that they cannot be saved, reply, that they cannot conceive how the justice of God should treat them with such severity. And I, for my own part, cannot conceive how God should treat you so indulgently; I cannot conceive how he should permit the sun to enlighten you. I cannot conceive how he, who holds the thunder in his hand, can apparently be an idle spectator of your impiety. I cannot conceive how the earth does not open beneath your feet, and, by its terrific jaws, anticipate the punishment prepared in hell by the divine vengeance.

You say again that this mercy, of which we draw so magnificent a portrait, is consequently very circumscribed. But say rather, how is it that you dare to start difficulties of this nature? God, *the blessed God*, the Supreme Being, has formed you of nothing; has given you his Son, has offered you his Spirit, has promised to bear with you such as you are, with all your infirmities, with all your corruptions, with all your weakness; has opened to you the gates of heaven; and being desirous to give you himself, he requires no return, but the consecration to him of your few remaining days on earth:

he excludes none from paradise, but hardened and impenitent men. How then, can you say that the mercy of God is circumscribed? What, is it impossible for God to be merciful unless he reward your crimes? Is nothing mercy with you, but that which permits an universal inundation of vice?

You still say, if the conditions of the new covenant are such as you have laid down, it is then an arduous task to become a Christian, and difficult to obtain salvation. But do you think, my brethren, that we are discouraged at the difficulty? Know you not, that *straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life?* Matt. vii. 14. Know you not, that we must *pluck out the eye, and cut off the hand?* v. 29. Surmount the most dear and delicate propensities; dissolve the ties of flesh and blood, of nature and self-attachment? Know you not, that we must *crucify the old man, and deny ourselves?* xvi. 24. Know you not, that *we must add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge patience, to patience brotherly-kindness, to brotherly-kindness charity, and to charity godliness?* 2 Pet. i. 5.

But you add, that few persons will then be saved; another objection we little fear, though perhaps, it would have been unanswerable, had not Jesus Christ taught us to reply. But is this a new gospel? Is it a new doctrine to say, that few shall be saved? Has not Jesus Christ himself declared it? I will address myself, on this subject, to those who understand the elucidation of types. I will adduce one type, a very distinguished type, a type not equivocal but terrific; it is the unhappy multitude of Is-

rael, who murmured against God, after being saved from the land of Egypt. The object of their journey was Canaan. Dent. i. 35, 36. God performed innumerable miracles to give them the land; the sea opened and gave them passage; bread descended from heaven to nourish them; water issued from the rock to quench their thirst. There was but one defect; they never entered into the land: there were but two adults, among all these myriads, who found admission. What is the import of this type? The very thing to which you object. The Israelites represent these hearers, the miracles represent the efforts of Providence for your salvation: Canaan is the figure of paradise, for which you hope, and Caleb and Joshua alone were admitted into the land, which so many miracles had apparently promised to the whole nation. What do these shadows adumbrate to the Christian world? My brethren, I will not dare to make the application. I leave with you this object for contemplation; this terrific subject for serious reflection.

But you still ask why do you preach to us such awful doctrine? It subverts religion; it drives people to despair. Great risk, indeed, and imminent danger of driving to despair, the men whom I attack! Suppress the poison, remove the dagger, exclude the idea of death from the mind, until the recollection of their sins shall drive them to the last extremity. But why? The characters whom we have described, those nominal Christians, those indolent souls, those men whose hearts are sold to the world and pleasure; have they weak and delicate



consciences, which we ought to spare, and for whom we ought to fear, lest the displays of divine justice should produce effects too severe and strong? Ah! unhappy people, even to mention difficulties of this nature. If you were already stretched on a dying bed; already come to the close of a criminal course; if hell had opened beneath to swallow you up; if you had no resource but the last efforts of an expiring soul, then you would be worthy of pity. But you are yet alive; grace is offered; all the paths of penitency are open; *the Lord may yet be found*: there is not one among you, but may call upon him with success. Yet you devote the whole of life to the world; you confirm the habits of corruption; and when we warn you, when we unmask your turpitude, when we discover the abyss into which you precipitate yourselves by choice, you complain that it is driving you to despair! Would to God that our voice might be exalted like thunder, and the brightness of our discourse be as that which struck St. Paul on the road to Damascus; prostrating you, like that apostle, at the feet of the Lord! Would to God that the horrors of despair, and the frightful images of hell, might fill you with salutary fear, inducing you to avoid it! Would to God that your body might, from this moment, *be delivered to Satan, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.* 1 Cor. v. 3.

It rests with you my brethren, to apply these truths; and to profit by the means which Providence, this day, affords for your conversion. If there yet remain any resources, any hopes for the man who



delays conversion, it is not with ministers of the gospel to point them out. We are not the plenipotentiaries of our religion: we are the ambassadors of Christ; we have explicit instructions, and our commission prescribed. God requires that we publish his covenant, that we promise you every aid of grace, that we open the treasures of mercy, that we lead you to heavenly places by the track, sprinkled with the blood of the Saviour of the world. But each of these privileges has conditions annexed, the nature of which you have heard. Comply with them, repent, give your conversion solid, habitual, and effective marks; then the treasures of grace are yours. But if you should persist in sin (to tell you truths to-day, which, perhaps, would be useless to-morrow,) if you should persist during life, and till approaching death, and the horrors of hell shall extort from you protestations of reform, and excite in you the semblance of conversion, we cannot, without doing violence to our instructions, and exceeding our commission, speak peace to your souls, and make you offers of salvation.

These considerations ought to exculpate ministers of the gospel, who know how to maintain the majesty of their mission, and correspond with their character. And if they exculpate us not in your estimation, they will justify us, at least, in the great day, when the most secret things shall be adduced in evidence. You are not acquainted with our ministry. You call us to the dying, whom we know either to have been wicked, or far from conforming to the conditions of the new covenant. This wick-

ed man, on the approach of death, composes himself; he talks solely of repentance, of mercy, and of tears. On seeing this exterior of conversion, you would have us presume, that such a man is more than converted; and, in that rash conclusion, you would have us offer him the highest place in the mansions of the blessed.

But woe, woe to those ministers, who, by a cruel lenity, precipitate souls into hell, under the delusion of opening to them the gates of paradise. Woe to that minister, who shall be so prodigal of the favours of God. Instead of speaking peace to such a man, *I would cry aloud; I would lift up my voice like a trumpet; I would shout. Isa. lviii. 1. I would thunder; I would shoot against him the arrows of the Almighty, and make the poison drink up his spirits. Job vi. 4.* Happy, if I might irradiate passions so prejudiced; if I might save by fear; if I might pluck from the burning, a soul so hardened in sin.

But if, as it commonly occurs, this dying man shall but devote to his conversion an exhausted body, and the last sighs of expiring life; woe, woe again, to that minister of the gospel, who, by a relaxed policy, shall, so to speak, canonize this man, as though he had died the death of the righteous! Let no one ask, What would you do? Would you trouble the ashes of the dead? Would you drive a family to despair? Would you affix a brand of infamy on an house?—What would I do? I would maintain the interests of my Master; I would act becoming a minister of Jesus Christ; I would prevent your taking an anti-christian death for a happy death; I would

profit by the loss I have now described ; and hold up this prey of the devil as a terror to the spectators, to the family, and to the whole church.

Would you know, my dear brethren, which is the way to prevent such great calamities ? Which is really the time to implore forgiveness, and to derive the Holy Spirit into your heart ? It is this moment, it is now. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.* Yes, he may be found to-day ; he may be found in this assembly ; he may be found under the word we are now speaking ; he may be found under the exhortations we give in his name : he may be found in the remorse, the anguish, the emotions, excited in your hearts, and which say, on his behalf, *seek ye my face.* He may be found in your closets, where he offers to converse with you in the most tender and familiar manner : he may be found among the poor, among the sick, among those dying carcasses, among those living images of death, and the tomb, which solicit your compassion ; and which open to you the way of charity that leads to God, who is charity itself. He may be found to-day, but perhaps, to-morrow, he will be found no more. Perhaps, to-morrow, you may seek in vain ; perhaps, to-morrow, your measure may be full ; perhaps, to-morrow, grace may be forever withdrawn ; perhaps, to-morrow, the sentence which decides your destiny shall be pronounced !

Ah ! who can estimate a moment so precious ! Ah ! who can compare his situation with the unhappy victims, which the divine vengeance has immolated in hell, and for whom time is no longer ! Who can, on withdrawing from this temple ; refraining

from so much vain conversation and criminal dissipation, who can forbear to prostrate himself at the footstool of the Divine Majesty; weeping for the past, reforming the present, and taking salutary precautions for the future. Who would not say with his heart, as well as his mouth, *Stay with me, Lord; I will not let thee go, until thou hast blessed me.* Gen. xxxii. 20. until thou hast vanquished my corruption, and given me the earnest of my salvation. The time of my visitation is almost expired; I see it, I know it, I feel it; my conversion requires a miracle; I ask this miracle of thee, and am resolved to obtain it of thy compassion.

My brethren, my dear brethren, we have no expressions sufficiently tender, no emotions sufficiently pathetic, no prayers sufficiently fervent, to draw you to this duty. Let your zeal supply our weakness. If we have brandished before your eyes the sword of divine vengeance, it is not to destroy but to save; it is not to drive you to despair, but to induce you *to sorrow after a godly sort, and with a repentance not to be repented of.* 2 Cor. ii. 10. It is incumbent on each of you who hear, and regard what I say, to participate in these advantages. May you, from the present moment, form a resolution to profit by an opportunity so precious. May the hour of your death, corresponding with the sincerity of your resolutions, and with the holiness of your lives, open to you the gates of heaven; and enable you to find in glory that God, whom you might have found merciful in this church. God grant you grace so to do. To Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory for ever. Amen.





## SERMON III.

*On the Delay of Conversion.*



ISAIAH IV. 6.

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

[THE SUBJECT CONCLUDED.]

**E**XPERIENCE, my brethren, is a great teacher ; it is a professor which adduces the most clear, solid, and indisputable proofs. Reason is an admirable endowment, given us for a guide in our researches after truth. Revelation has been happily added, to correct and conduct it ; but both have their difficulties. Reason is circumscribed, its views are confined, its deviations frequent ; and the false inferences we perceive it deduces, render doubtful its most clear and evident conclusions. Revelation, however venerable its tribunal, however infallible its decisions, *is foolishness*, says the apostle, *to the natural man* ; it is exposed to the erroneous glosses of critics, to the difficulties of heretics, and the contradiction of infidels. But experience is without exception ; it speaks to the heart, to the senses, and the understanding ; it neither reasons nor debates, but carries conviction and proof. It so captivates the consent of the Chris-

tian, the philosopher, and even the atheist, that nothing but mental derangement can induce a man to combat its decisions.

This is the grand instructor who shall preach to-day in this pulpit. In illustrating the words of the text, it is not sufficient that we have demonstrated, in our preceding discourses, from reason and Scripture, the folly of the sinner, who delays his conversion; it is not sufficient that philosophy and religion have both concurred to prove, that in order to labour successfully at the work of salvation, we must begin in early life, in the time of health, and in the days of youth. We will prove it by experience; we will demonstrate it by sad tests and instances of the truths we have delivered; we will produce to you awful declarations of the the wrath of heaven, which cry to you with a strong and tender voice, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

These witnesses, these tests, these cases, shall be adduced from persons, who were once placed in your present situation; acquainted with the will of God, warned by his servants, and living, as St. Peter expresses himself, *at a period, in which the long suffering of God awaited them.* 1 Pet. iii. 20. And you, even you, Christians, will one day become what they now are, awful examples of the wrath of God; eternal monuments of his indignation and vengeance; unless your eyes, opened by so much light, unless your hearts, impressed by so many motives, unless your consciences, alarmed by the dreadful judgments of God, shall take measures to prevent the

sentence, already prepared in his eternal counsels, and the execution of which is at the door.

But does it not seem to you, my brethren, that we undertake a task too arduous, when we engage to prove, from experience, that the long suffering of God is restricted ; and that, by delaying conversion, we risk the total frustration of the work ? You have already alleged, I am aware, an almost infinite number of sinners, who apparently subvert our principles ; so many servants, called at the eleventh hour ; so many hearts, which grace has changed in a moment ; so many penitents, who, in the first essays of repentance, have found the arms of mercy open ; and whose happy success consoles, to the present hour, the imitators of their crimes.

We shall hear your reasons, before we propose our own. We would leave nothing behind, which might occasion a mistake, in which it is so dangerous to deceive. Our discourse shall turn on these two points : first, we will examine the cases of those sinners, which seem to favour the conduct of those who delay conversion ; then we shall allege, in the second place, those which confirm our principle, and make a direct attack on security and delay.

I. We shall examine the case of those sinners, which seem to militate against what we have advanced in the preceding discourses. All that we then advanced, may be comprised under two heads. We said, first, that in order to acquire the habit of piety, there was but one way, the daily exercise of all its duties. We affirmed, secondly, that the period of mercy is restricted ; and that we risk a total exclu-

sion, when we offer to God only the last groans of expiring life. We founded our first proposition on the force of habits, and on the nature of the Holy Spirit's economy, who, for the most part, abandons to their own turpitude, those that resist his grace. This was the subject of our first sermon, and the second part of the other. We established our second proposition on the new covenant, which offers us mercy, solely on condition of repentance, faith, and the love of God; consequently, which renders dubious the state of those, who have not bestowed upon those virtues, the time adequate to their acquisition. These are the two principal heads, which comprise all that we have advanced upon this subject.

You may oppose to us two classes of examples. In the first class, you may arrange those instantaneous conversions, which grace has effectuated in a moment by a single stroke ; and which apparently destroy what we have advanced on the force of habits, and on the economy of the Holy Spirit. In the second class, you will put those other sinners, who, after the perpetration of enormous crimes, have obtained remission by a sigh, by a wish, by a few tears ; and afford presumptive hopes, that to whatever excess we may carry our crimes, we shall never exceed the terms of mercy, or obstruct reception at the throne of grace.

You adduce those sudden conversions, those instantaneous changes on the spot, without difficulty, labour, and repeated endeavours. Of this class, we have various examples in Scripture. We have Simon, we have Andrew, we have James the son of

Zebedee, and most of the apostles, whom Jesus Christ found engaged in the humble trade of fishing, or collecting the tribute; and who were instantaneously endued with divine thoughts, new desires, and heavenly propensities; who, from the meanest artisans, became the heralds of the gospel; formed the noble design of conquering the universe, and subjugating the world to the empire of their Master.

With this class, may also be associated the example of Zaccheus; who seems to have been renovated in a moment, and to have reformed on the spot, and without the previous duties of piety, a passion the most obstinate, which grows with age, and from which scarcely any one is converted. He assumed a language unheard of in the mouth of a merchant, and especially a covetous merchant: *The half of my goods I give to feed the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.* Luke xix. 8. To the same class you may add those thousands of persons, who changed their faith, and reformed their lives, on the first preaching of the apostles.

After so many trophies erected to the power of grace, what becomes of your arguments, you say, on the force of habits, on the genius of the Holy Spirit's economy? Who will maintain, after this, that habits of piety may not be acquired without labour, fatigue, and the duties of devotion? Why may I not promise myself, after devoting the most of my life to pleasure, to have the same power over my heart as Zaccheus, the apostles, and first converts to Chris-



tianity? Why may I not expect the irradiations which enlightened, the aids which attracted, and the omnipotent power, which converted them in a moment? Why should I make myself a perpetual martyr to forward a work, which one of those happy moments shall perfectly consummate? These are the first difficulties, and the first examples, you adduce.

You oppose in the second plea, the case of those sinners, who, after committing the greatest crimes, have found, on the first efforts of repentance, the arms of mercy open for their reception. Of this class, there are many in the Scriptures: the principal are David, St. Peter, St. Paul, and the converted thief, who has a nearer connection with our subject than any of the others. These are names, which the wicked have continually in their mouths; and it must be acknowledged, that they are distinguished monuments of divine mercy. It would seem that you may deduce this consequence, that to whatever degree you may have carried vice, there is some ground to expect pardon and salvation.

After so many examples of divine mercy, sinners will readily say, how is it that you alarm us with so many fears? Why do you draw so many terrific portraits of the justice of God? And why exclude the sinner however corrupt, from the throne of grace? I who may have a secret intrigue, scarcely suspected, very far from being known to the world, shall I have more difficulty in obtaining mercy than David, who committed adultery in the face of all Israel? I who may have absented myself for a time from the true church, shall I have more difficulty in obtaining mer-

cy than St. Paul, who persecuted the saints ; or St. Peter, who openly denied his Master, and in his Master's presence ? I who have not directly robbed, but have been contented with acquiring goods by means clandestine indeed, but at the same time sanctioned by example, by custom, by the usages of fraud and art ; by palliated lies, and oaths contrary to truth ; but essential in the employment to which I am providentially called, shall I be more faulty than the converted thief who robbed on the highway ? What should hinder me then from following those personages in vice during life, reserving time to throw myself into the arms of mercy, and imitate their repentance in my last hours ?

Have you, sinners, said enough ? Are these all your *hidden things of dishonesty*, and all the frivolous pretences of which Satan avails himself to secure you in his fold ? See then to what tends your religion, and the use you make of our Scriptures. The Holy Spirit has delineated the lives of those illustrious men who once were vessels of honour in the Lord's house ; he has *surrounded you with a cloud of witnesses*, for animation in your course, by the example of men like yourselves, who have finished with joy. He has also left you a history of their defects, to excite you to vigilance, saying to every sinner, take care, if those distinguished saints stumbled ; what will thy fall be when thou shalt relax ? If those main pillars have been shaken, what has not the bruised reed to fear ? If the cedars of Lebanon have been ready to tumble, what shall be the destiny of the hyssop of the wall ? To those reflections

you are deaf; and to deceive the Eternal Wisdom, and *to be wiser in your foolish generation*, than the Father of lights himself, you draw from these examples, designed to make you wise, motives to confirm you in your crimes. We shall endeavour to solve the whole of your sophisms.

We shall first make this general observation ; that when we said in the preceding discourse, we must, in order to acquire the habit of piety, perform its duties, and to obtain admission at the throne of grace, we must demonstrate our faith by a course of virtuous actions, we told you only what commonly occurs in the course of religion. We did not include in our remarks, the overpowering and extraordinary operations of grace. For God, who was pleased sometimes to supersede the laws of nature, supersedes also, on some occasions, the laws of religion, by graciously enlarging the limits of the new covenant. The laws followed in nature are wisely established. He has assigned a pavilion to the sun, and balanced the earth on its poles. He has prescribed boundaries to the sea, and obliged this impetuous element to respect the commands of its Creator. *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further ; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.* Job. xxxviii. 11. We have seen him not only supersede the laws of nature, but likewise discover as much wisdom in their suspension as in their establishment. We have sometimes seen the earth quake ; the sun stop and suspend his course : the waters of the sea advancing before, or retiring behind, *divide themselves as a wall on the right hand, and on the left.* Exod. xiv. 22. as well to favour his

chosen people, as to destroy the rebellious nation. The laws of religion, and the conditions of his covenant, are also perfectly wise, and equally founded on goodness and equity : meanwhile, God is pleased sometimes to suspend them, and to enlarge the limits of grace.

This thought aptly applies to many of the cases you adduce, and particularly to instantaneous conversions. They are not the usual way in which the Holy Spirit proceeds ; they do not occur in the ordinary course of religion. They are exceptions to the general laws, they are miracles. Instead therefore of judging of the general laws of religion, by these particular instances, you should rectify your notion of them by those general laws.—Ah ! temporizing directors, apostate casuists, pests of the public, you compose your penitents with deceitful hope. This is our first solution.

When a physician, after exhausting all the powers of art to restore the sick, finds his prescriptions baffled, his endeavours without effect, and his skill destitute of resource : when he finds the brain delirious, the circulation of the blood irregular, the chest oppressed, and nature ready to fall under the pressure of disease, he says it is a lost case. He presumes not to say, that God cannot heal him ; nor that he has never seen a recovery in similar circumstances ; he speaks according to the course of nature ; he judges according to the rules of art ; he decides as a physician, and not as a worker of miracles. Just so, when we see a man in the church, who has persisted thirty, forty, or fifty years in a course of crimes ; when



we see this man struck with death, that his first concern is for the health of his body, that he calls both nature and art to his assistance ; that his hopes being lost, he turns his attention towards religion, desires to be converted, weeps, groans, and prays ; that he discovers to us the semblance of conversion ; this man's state is doubtful, and exceeding doubtful. But we speak according to the ordinary course of religion : knowing that God is almighty, we exclude not the occurrence of miracles. Hence all the cases you adduce are prodigies of conversion, in which God has exceeded ordinary laws, and from which no conclusions can be drawn ; and all that you add on the power of God, on the irresistible, renovating and victorious efficacy of grace, however solid on other occasions, when applied to this subject, are empty declamations, and foreign to the point.

But are all those examples of conversion, and repentance, miracles : No, my brethren, nor is this the whole of our reply ; and had we proved that they are all such in effect, we should indeed have done little, and you would have returned home, flattered, perhaps, that God would do the same prodigies for you in a dying hour. Let us enter into a more minute discussion ; let us remark,—and this is our grand solution,—let us remark, that among all the sinners whose conversion you adduce, there was not one, no not one in the condition of the Christian who neglecting his salvation, presumes to offer to God only the dregs of life, and the last groans of expiring nature. No ; of all those sinners, there is



not one who was in the situation of such a man ; consequently, there is not one, no not one, who can afford the shadow of a rational excuse to flatter the men we now attack. Let us illustrate this reflection ; it is of the last importance. You may remark five essential distinctions. They differed—either with regard to their light—or with regard to their motives—or with regard to the duration of their crime—or with regard to their virtues—or with regard to the certainty of their repentance and conversion : five considerations, my brethren, which you cannot too deeply inculcate on your minds. Some of them apply to the whole, others to a part. Let each of you apply to himself that portion of our remarks on these conversions which corresponds with his case.

We shall speak first of the illumination of those two classes of sinners ; we affirm that there is an essential difference between the men whose example is adduced, and the Christians who delay conversion. Of all those sinners, there was not one, who possessed the light which we have at the present day. Zaccheus, the apostles, the prophets, David, and all the persons at the period in question, were in this respect inferior to the most ignorant Christian. Jesus Christ has decided, that *the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they*, Luke vii. 28. St. Peter had not seen the resurrection of his Master, when he had the weakness to deny him. The converted thief had, perhaps, never heard his name, while abandoned to his crimes ; and St. Paul, while persecuting the church, followed the old prejudices of Judaism, *he did it ignorantly*, as he himself affirms. 1 Tim. i. 13.

This is the first consideration which aggravates your condemnation, and renders your salvation doubtful, if you defer the work. *The grace of God has appeared to all men.* You are born in so enlightened an age that the human mind seems to have attained the highest period of perfection to which its weakness will permit it to arrive. Philosophy has been disencumbered of all ambiguous terms, of all useless punctilios, and of all the pompous nothings, which confused rather than formed the minds of youth. Theology is purged, at least on most subjects, and would to God that it was altogether purged, of the abstruse researches, and trifling disquisitions which amused our fathers. If some weak minds still follow the former notions, they only render themselves ridiculous; they thereby weary the people, disgust the learned, and are left to detail their maxims to the dusty walls of their deserted schools.

How clearly have they proved, for instance, the being of God? On how many clear, easy, and demonstrative evidences, have they established this fundamental article of religion? How clear and conclusive have they made the doctrine of the immortality of the soul? How readily has philosophy coincided with religion on this article, to disengage spirit from matter, to mark the functions of each substance, to distinguish which belongs to the body, and which to the mind? How clearly also have they proved the truth of religion? With what industry have they investigated the abyss of ancient literature, demon-

strated and rendered notorious the prodigies achieved in the seventeenth century?

I speak not this to make an eulogium on our age, and elevate it in your esteem. I have, my brethren, views more exalted. All the knowledge of this period is dispensed by that wise Providence which watches over your salvation, and it will serve for your refutation. The economy of the Holy Spirit, who illuminates your mind, has been fully discussed. If, therefore, it be true, that the atrocity of sin is proportionate to the knowledge of the delinquent;—if it be true, that those *who know their Master's will, and do it not, shall be punished with more stripes than those who are ignorant and negligent*, Luke xii. 47;—if it be true, that the sin of such persons remaineth, as Jesus Christ has affirmed, John ix. 41;—if it be true, that *it were better not to have known the way of righteousness, than to turn from the holy commandment*, 2 Peter, ii. 21.;—if it be true, that God will require five talents of those who have received five, while those who have received but two shall be only accountable for two, Matt. xxv.—if it be true, that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, than for Chorazin and Bethsaida;—it is also true, that your arguments are sophistical; that the example of those sinners can afford you nothing but deceitful hopes, which flatter the delay of conversion.

From the first consideration arises another, which constitutes a second difference; that is, the motives which press you to conversion were scarcely known to the others. You are pressed more than they by

motives of knowledge. What were all the favours which they received of God, in comparison of those heaped on you; you are born in *an accepted time, in a day of salvation*, 1 Cor. vi. 2.; in those happy days *which so many righteous men and prophets desired to see*, Matt. xiii. 17. You are pressed more than they by motives of interest, *you have received of his fullness, and grace for grace*, John i. 16; you to whom Christ has *revealed immortality and life*, 2 Tim. i. 10.; who having received such promises, you ought to be the more separated *from all filthiness of the flesh, and of the spirit*,—more than they, by motives of fear, *for, knowing the terrors of the Lord*, you ought to be the more obedient to his will,—more than they by motives of emulation; you have not only *the cloud of witnesses*, but the grand pattern, the the model of perfection, who has left us so fine an example that we should tread in his steps; who has said, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart*. Matt. xi. 29. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith; you ought, according to St. Paul's exhortation, to be induced *not to cast away your confidence*, Heb. x. 35.—More than they by the grandeur of your heavenly birth; *you have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*, Rom. viii. 15.

What is the result of all these arguments? If you have more motives, you are more culpable; and, if you are more culpable, the mercy which they have obtained, concludes nothing in your favour; and the objection which you derive from example, is alto-



gether sophistical. And what is worse, this superabundance of motives renders your conversion more difficult, and thereby destroys the hopes you found on their example. For though the Holy Spirit has a supreme power over the heart, nothing, however, is more invariable, than that in promoting our conversion, he acts with us as rational beings, and in conformity to our nature; he proposes motives, and avails himself of their force, to induce us to duty. Consequently, when the heart has long resisted the grand motives of conversion, it becomes obdurate.

How were those miraculous conversions achieved to which you appeal? It was in a way totally inapplicable to you. The first time Zaccheus saw Jesus Christ, he received the promise of salvation. Zaccheus feeling, by the efficacy of grace, the force of a motive never experienced before, yielded immediately and without hesitation. The converts, on the day of Pentecost, were in suspense concerning what opinion they should form of Jesus Christ: they had crucified him in ignorance, and Jerusalem remained undecided what to think of him after his death. The apostles preached; they proved by miracles the truth of his resurrection. Then those men, being struck with motives never before proposed, yielded at once. Thus the Holy Spirit operated in their hearts; but in conformity to their nature, proposing motives, and employing their force to captivate the heart.

But these operations of the Holy Spirit have lost their effect with regard to you. What motives can be in future proposed, which have not been urged a



thousand times, and which have consequently lost their efficacy? Is it the mercy of God? That you have turned into lasciviousness. Is it the image of Jesus Christ crucified? Him you daily crucify afresh, without remorse and without repentance. Is it the hope of heaven? You look only at *the things which are seen*. Is it the fear of hell? That has been painted a thousand and a thousand times, and you have acquired the art of braving its terrors and torments. If God should therefore, employ in your behalf the same degree of power, which effectuated those instantaneous conversions, it would be found insufficient; if he should employ for you the same miracle, that miracle would be too weak. It would require a more abundant portion of grace to convert you, than it did to convert the others; consequently, a miracle less distinguished than was afforded them, concludes nothing in favour of that which is the object of your hope, and the flimsy foundation of your security.

A third difference is derived from the duration of their crimes. Of all the sinners we have enumerated, if we may except the converted thief, there was not one who persevered in vice to the close of life. St. Peter, St. Paul, and David, were but a few moments, but a few days, or a few years at most, entangled in sin. They consecrated the best part of life to the service of God. They were unfaithful in a few instances, but afterwards their fidelity was unremitting.

I acknowledge the good thief seems to have, with the sinners we attack, the sad similarity of persisting

in vice to the end of life. But his history is so short in the Gospel, the circumstances related are so few, and the conjectures we may make on this subject are so doubtful and uncertain, that a rational man can find in it, no certain rule for the regulation of his conduct.

Who was this thief? What was his crime? What induced him to commit it? What was the first instance of his depravity? What was that of his repentance? What means did grace employ for his conversion? So many questions, and so many doubts, are so many sufficient reasons for inferring nothing from his conversion. Perhaps he has been engaged in this awful course but a short time. Perhaps, seduced by an unhappy ease, he was less guilty of theft than of softness and compliance. Perhaps only the accomplice of Barabbas in sedition, he had less design of disturbing society, than in restricting the tyrannic and exorbitant power of the Romans. Perhaps surprised by weakness, or tempted by necessity, he had received sentence for his first offence. Perhaps having languished a long time in prison, he had repented of his sin. We do not affirm these things, they are merely conjectures; but all that you can object are similar conjectures, refuted with the same ease. And after the like refutation of all these probabilities, how many criminating circumstances occur in your life, which were not in his. We said, that he had not received the education which you have; he had not received the torrent of grace, with which you are inundated; he was unacquainted with a thousand motives, which operate on you; the mo-

ment he saw Jesus Christ, he loved him, and he believed on him. How was that? With what faith? At what time? In a manner the most heroic in the world: with such a faith as was never found in Israel. At a time when Jesus Christ was fixed on the cross; when he was pierced with the nails; when he was delivered to a frantic populace; when they spit upon him; when he was mocked by the Greek; when he was rejected by the Jew; when he was betrayed by Judas; when St. Peter denied him; when his disciples fled; when Jesus made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, the *thief*,—the *thief* seemed to be the *only* believer, and he alone to constitute the whole church. After all, this is but a solitary example: if the converted thief afford you consolation in your crimes, tremble, ye sinners, when ye cast your eyes on him, who was hardened at his side; and let the singularity of this late conversion induce you to fear, lest you should not have been chosen of God to furnish to the universe a second proof of the success of a conversion, deferred to the hour of death.

A fourth reflection turns on the virtues of those sinners, whose example you adduce. For though one criminal habit may suffice, where repentance is wanting, to plunge into the abyss, him who is captivated with it, whatever his virtues may be; yet there is a vast disparity between the state of two men, one of whom has fallen, indeed, into a crime, but who otherwise has the virtues of a great saint; and the other of whom has fallen into the same crime, but is wanting in those virtues. You bear with a fault in

a servant, when he is well qualified for your service ; but this defect would be insupportable in the person of another, destitute of those talents.

Apply this remark to the subject in hand. It is a duty to inquire, whether God will extend his mercy to you, after the perpetration of notorious offences. You allege, for your comfort, the case of those sinners who have obtained mercy ; after having proceeded in vice, at least, according to your opinion, as far as yourself. Take two balances : weigh with one hand *their* crimes, and *your* crimes ; weigh with the other *their* virtues, and *your* virtues. If the weights are equal, your argument is conclusive ; the grace which they obtained, is an infallible testimony that you shall not be excluded. But if you should find, on inquiry, a difference ; if you should find, on your dying bed, that you have resembled them in what is odious, and not in what is acceptable, do you not perceive the impropriety of your presumption, and the absurdity of your hopes ?

Now, who is there among us abandoned to vice, that will compare himself with those illustrious saints in regard to virtue ; as it is readily acknowledged that they resemble them in regard to faults ? You follow, to-day, *the multitude to do evil*, as Zaccheus, and, as the apostles before their conversion : so far the parallel is just ; but can you prove, like them, that you obeyed the first calls of Jesus Christ ; that you have never been offended, neither with the severity of his precepts, nor with the bloody horrors of his cross and martyrdom ? You sacrifice, like David, to an impudent Bathsheba, the rights of the Lord, who en-



joins temperance and modesty : so far the parallel is just ; but have you, like him, had *the law of God in your heart* ? Have you, like him, *rose at midnight, to sing praises to God* ? Have you, like him, made charity your glory, and piety your delight ? You have persecuted the church, like St. Paul, by malicious objections, and profane sneers ; you have made havock of the flock, as this zealot once did, by persecutions and punishments : so far the parallel is just ; but have you asked Jesus Christ, as he did, *Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do* ? And, as soon as he appeared to you by the way to Damascus ? Have you not conferred with flesh and blood, when required, like him, to go up to Jerusalem, and abjure the prejudices of your fathers ? Has your zeal resembled his, so as to feel your spirit stirred within you, at the sight of a superstitious altar ? And has your love resembled his, so as to be willing to be accursed for your brethren ? You have denied Jesus Christ, as St. Peter ; and that criminal laxity, which induced you to comply in such and such company, when your virtue was assailed, has made you like this apostle, who denied him in the court of Caiphaz : so far the parallel is just ; but have you, like him, burned with zeal for the interests of his glory ? Have you said, with an ardour like his, *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee* ? Have you, like these saints, been ready to seal the truths of the Gospel with your blood ; and, after being a gazing-stock to the world, are you, like them, ready to be offered up ? You, like the thief, have that false weight, and that short measure, which you secretly use on your counter, and in your



warehouse ; or that authority, which you openly abuse in the face of the world, and on the seat of justice : you liberate the culprits, who, perhaps, have imposed on strangers, or attacked them with open force : so far the parallel is just ; but have you, like him, had eyes, which penetrated through the clouds, with which Christ was surrounded on the cross ? Have you, like him, discovered the God of heaven and earth, in the person of the crucified Redeemer ? Have you, like him, repaired, with the sincerity of your expiring breath, the crimes of your whole life ? If the parallel be still just, your argument is good, and your recourse to mercy shall be attended with the same success. But if the parallel be defective ; if you find, on your death-bed, that you have followed those characters solely in what was sinful, then your argument is false ; and you ought, at least, to relinquish the hopes you have founded on their examples.

5. We find, in short, another difference between the men who delay conversion, and the sinners, whose cases they adduce : it is evident that they were converted and obtained mercy, whereas it is extremely doubtful whether the others shall ever obtain it, and be converted. What, according to your mode of arguing, constitutes the strength of your objection, becomes the solidity of our reply. A sinner, in the career of crimes, is in a fluctuating condition between life and death ; equally uncertain whether he shall obtain salvation, or become the victim of perdition. These men who delay conversion, these are the sinners we have to attack. You allege the case of cha-

racters, whose state has been already determined; and whose repentance has been realized by experience. Each of these, while, like you, habituated to vice, was, like you, uncertain whether they should obtain mercy, or whether the door would be shut. Access was opened, pardon was granted. Thus the question is decided; and all doubts, with regard to them, are done away.

But your situation is quite the reverse. You have the sins of their fluctuating state, not the grace of their determined condition, which induces confidence. In this painful suspense, who is in the right? We, who tremble at the awful risk you run; or you, who rely on the precarious hope of extricating yourselves from sin? Who is in the right? Those accommodating guides, who, in your greatest profligacy, continually assure you of the divine mercy, which serves merely as a pretext to confirm you in crimes; or we who brandish before your eyes the awful sword of justice, to alarm your indolence, and rouse you from soft security?

Collect now, my brethren, all this variety of reflections; and, if there remain with you a shadow of honesty, renounce the advantage you pretend to derive from these examples. Consider, that many of these conversions are not only out of the common course of religion, but also that they could not have been effectuated by less than miraculous powers. Consider that, among all those sinners, there was not one in the situation of a Christian, who delays conversion to the close of life. Consider that you are enlightened with meridian lustre, which they had scarce-

ly seen. Consider that you are pressed with a thousand motives unknown to them. Consider that they continued, for the most part, but a *short time* in sin ; but you have wasted life in folly. Consider, that they possessed distinguished virtues, which rendered them dear to God ; but you have nothing to offer him but dissipation or indolence. Consider, that they were distinguished by repentance, which afforded constant proof of their sincerity : whereas it is still doubtful, whether you shall ever be converted, and you go the way to make it impossible. See, then, whether your arguments are just, and whether your hopes are properly founded.

These examples we acknowledge, my brethren, are very encouraging to those who diligently endeavour to reform. We delight in enforcing them to those contrite and simple souls ; those bruised and timorous souls, who tremble at God's word. We came not to straighten the way to heaven ; we came not to preach a severe morality, and to announce a Divinity ferocious and cruel. Would to God that every sinner, in this assembly, would recollect himself, and swell the catalogue of converts, in which grace has been triumphant ! But hardened men can infer nothing hence, except alarming considerations.

Hitherto we have examined the cases of those sinners, who apparently contradict our principles ; let us, in the next place, briefly review those, by which they are confirmed. Let us prove that the long-suffering of God has its limits ; and that in order to find him propitious, we must *seek the Lord while he*

*may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* This is our second head.

II. Three distinguished classes of examples, my brethren, three alarming monuments, confirm those illustrious truths. These are—

I. Public catastrophes. II. Obdurate sinners. III. Dying men.—Happy are they who are cautioned by the calamities of others!

I. Public catastrophes. There is to every government, to every nation, and to every church, a limited day of visitation: there is a time in which the Lord may be found, and a time in which he will not be found. “A time when he may be found:” when commerce flourishes, when families prosper, when armies conquer, when politics succeed, when the temples are open, when the solemn feasts are observed, and the faithful say one to another, *O come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.* This is the time *when the Lord may be found.* Happy time, which would have been restricted only by the duration of the world, had not the ingratitude of man introduced another time, in which *the Lord will not be found.* Then commerce languishes, families degenerate, armies are defeated, politics are confused, churches are overturned, the solemn feasts subside; *and the earth, according to Moses, vomiteth out its inhabitants.*

Isaiah has given us a proof of this awful truth, in the Jews of his own age. He preached, he prayed, he exhorted, he threatened, he thundered. How often was his voice heard in the streets of Jerusalem!

Sometimes he would draw them with the cords of humanity; sometimes he would save them *with fear, pulling them out of the fire*. How often did he proclaim among them those terrific words—*Behold the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water; the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, and the captain of fifty; and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator*, Isaiah iii. 1, 2, 3. How often did he say to them by divine authority—*Hear ye what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it*, v. 5, 6. How often did he describe the future calamities of his country; the Chaldeans approaching; Jerusalem besieged; the city encumbered with the dead; the temple of the Lord reduced to heaps of stones; the holy mountain streaming with blood; Judea buried in ashes, or swimming with the blood of its inhabitants? How often did he cry with a feeling heart, *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandment! Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the crown of the head, there is no soundness in it*, Isa. i. 5, 6. *Howl O gate, cry O city, thou whole Palestina art dissolved*, Isa. xiv. 31. *En-*



*ter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust for the fear of the Lord, Isa. ii. 10.* That was the time to have prevented the whole ; that was the aim of the prophet and the design of our text. But the Jews hardened themselves against his voice. God pronounced the sentence ; he executed his word : he commanded the Chaldeans to invest the walls of Jerusalem ; and then says the sacred historian, *there was no remedy, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.* The Israelites made a variety of efforts to appease the wrath of heaven ; the aged raised aloud their plaintive and trembling voices, the young poured forth a mournful and piercing cry ; the daughters of Jerusalem lifted up their lamentations to heaven ; the priests wept aloud between the porch and the altar, they said a thousand and a thousand times, *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage unto shame, Joel ii. 17.* But the deed was done, the time was past, *the Lord would not be found,* and all this semblance of repentance, the smallest portion of which would perhaps, on another occasion, have sufficed to disarm the wrath of heaven, was without effect. This is expressed in so noble and energetic a manner, that we would for ever imprint it on your memory. *The Lord God of their fathers sent to them his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, till the wrath of the Lord arose against his people. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew the young people with the sword, and had no compassion on the young man, nor the aged, nor the infirm. They burnt the*

*house of God, and demolished his palaces, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16, 17.*

What happened to ancient Jerusalem, also happened to modern Jerusalem: by which Jerusalem I mean the city, as it stood in our Saviour's time. A thousand oracles had predicted the advent of the Messiah; the prophets had said that he should come; St. John the Baptist affirmed, that he was at the door; Jesus Christ came, in short, saying, *Here I am.* He walked in the streets of Jerusalem, he instructed them by his doctrine, he astonished them by his miracles, he influenced them by his example; he cried in their assemblies, *Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you.* John xii. 35. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* Matt. xxiii. 37. That was the time; but they suffered the precious moments to escape. And what did Jesus add? He *wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.* Luke xix. 42. Jerusalem was not, however, yet destroyed; the temple still stood; the Romans offered them peace; the seige was not commenced; more than forty years elapsed between the threatening and the stroke. But, ah! from that time *these things were hid from their eyes*; from that time their destruction was determined; from that time their day of grace was expired, and their ruin finally fixed. So true it is, that the long-suffering of

God is limited, and that mercy cannot always be obtained at the expected period, and precise moment on which we had fondly relied.

But, my brethren, to whom do I preach? To whom do I this day prove these melancholy truths? Of whom is this audience composed? Who are those *brands plucked from the burning, and come up out of great tribulation*? By what stroke of Providence is the mass I now see convened from so many provinces? Whence are you? In what country were you born? Ah! my brethren, you are but two well-instructed in the truths I now preach! The time of long-suffering is limited; need we prove it? Can you be ignorant of it? Are you not witnesses of it by experience? Are not our proofs sufficiently evident? Do you ask for arguments more conclusive? Come, see; let us go to the ruins of our temples: let us survey the rubbish of our sanctuaries: let us see our galley-slaves chained to the oar, and our confessors in irons: let us see *the land which has vomited us on the face of the earth*; and the name of refugee, venerable shall I call it, or the horror of the whole world? And to present you with objects still more affecting; let us see our brethren at the foot of an altar which they believe idolatrous, mothers preserving the fortune of their families at the expense of their children's souls, whom they devote to idolatry; and by a sad reverse, preserving that same fortune to their children at the expense of their own souls.\* Yield, yield to our calamities ye

\* An edict was published by the king of France, commanding his officers to confiscate the goods of those who did not perform the acts of a good Catholic in their last hours.

catastrophes of ages past ! Ye mothers whose tragic memory appals posterity, because you were compelled by the horrors of the famine to eat the flesh of your sons, preserving your own life by snatching it from those who had received it of you ! However bloody your situation might be, you deprived them after all but of a momentary life, thereby saving both them and yourselves from the horrors of famine. But here both are precipitated into the same abyss. The mother, by a prodigy unheard of, if I must so speak, nourishes herself with the substance of her son's soul, and the son in his turn nourishes himself with the substance of his mother's soul.

Ah ! my brethren, these are our proofs ; these are our arguments ; these are the solutions we give of your objections ; this is really the time in which *the Lord will not be found*. For, since your calamities, what efforts have been used to terminate them, and to soften the vengeance which pursues you ! How many humiliations ! How many fasts ! How many intercessions ! How many tears ! How many protestations ! How many disconsolate mothers, satisfied with the ruin of their families, have asked no spoil, but the soul of their children ! How many Jobs, how many Samuels, have stood before God, and implored the liberation of his church ! But all in vain. The time was past, the Lord would be found no more, and perhaps,—perhaps,—no more for ever.

Happy, in the extreme of our misery, if we may yet hope, that they will be salutary to those who have reached the shore in the shipwreck ! For, my brethren, we consent that you should turn away



your eyes from whatever is glorious in our exile, to look solely at that which is deplorable. What do you say to those distressed fugitives, and dismembered families? We are sent by the God of vengeance. In banishing us from our country, he said go,—go, unhappy people;—go and tell the world the consequences of falling into the hands of an angry God. Teach the Christian world your bloody, but salutary lessons; tell my children, in every part of the earth, what may be their situation: *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*. Luke xiii. 3. But you yet stand, ye walls of this temple; you yet flourish, O happy provinces: though the long-suffering of God has its limits. But I check myself on the verge of this awful prediction.

II. Merely enumerating the remaining subjects, I would say, that experience, in the case of hardened sinners, supplies us with a second example. It is a received opinion, and not without some foundation, that the period of repentance extends to the whole of life, and that God has no design in sparing us, but to promote our conversion. This is the sense of the Chaldee paraphrase; for so it renders the text; *Seek ye the Lord while you have life, call ye upon him while you are spared upon the earth*. We will not oppose the thought; meanwhile we confidently affirm, that we daily see among our hearers sinners whom grace seems to have forsaken, and who appear to be lost without resource.

How often do we see people among us so habituated to offend against the dictates of conscience, as to sin without remorse, and without repentance! If the



things we preach to you were problematical ;—if they were things which so far excited doubt and uncertainty in the mind, that we could not be assured of their reality ;—if they were merely allowed, or forbidden, we should not be surprised at this insensibility. But do we not see persons in cold blood committing the most atrocious crimes, carrying on infamous intrigues, nourishing inveterate prejudices, handing them down from father to son, and making them the heritage of the family ? Do we not see them committing those things in cold blood, and less shocked now at the enormity of their crimes, than they formerly were at the mere thought of them, and who are as insensible of all we say to affect them, as if we were repeating fables, or reciting frivolous tales ? Whence does this proceed, my brethren ? From the same cause we have endeavoured to prove in our preceding discourses, that habits, if not corrected, become confirmed : that the Holy Spirit withdraws ; that he ceases to knock at the door of our hearts, and leaves us to ourselves when we resist his grace. These are *seared consciences* ; they are fascinated minds ; these are men given up to a spirit of delusion. Rom. i. 21. *Their hearts are waxed gross ; they have eyes, and they see not, they have hearts, and they do not understand.* Isa. vi. 10. If the arguments already advanced in the preceding discourses, have been incapable of producing conviction, do not, at least, dispute with us what you see every day, and what passes before your eyes. Preachers, be not astonished after this, if your arguments, if your proofs, if

your demonstrations, if your exhortations, if your most tender and pathetic entreaties have little effect. God himself fights against you. You demonstrate, and God blinds their eyes; you exhort, and God hardens the heart; and that Spirit,—that Spirit who by his victorious power, endeavours to illuminate the simple, and make them that fear him to understand his secret;—that Spirit, by the power of vengeance, hardens the others in their wilful insensibility.

This awful period often comes with greater rapidity than we think. When we speak of sinners who are become incorrigible, we understand not only the aged, who have run a course of fifty or sixty years in crimes, and in whom sin is become natural. We speak also of those less advanced in age; who have refused to devote to God the early years of youth; who have assumed the fashionable title of infidelity, and atheism; who are in effect, become atheists, and have imbibed prejudices, from which it is now impossible to move them. At first this was simply a want of zeal; then it became indifference, then followed coldness, and indolence, afterwards contempt of religion, and in the issue, the most obstinate and outrageous profaneness. I select cases which are yet susceptible of good impressions. They are providentially placed in open view to inspire you with holy fear; God has exposed them in his church as buoys and beacons, erected on the coast to warn the mariners; they say, keep your distance in passing here, fly this dreadful place, let the remains of this

shipwreck induce you to seek deep waters, and a safer course.

III. Let us produce a third example, and would to God that we had less authority for producing it, and fewer instructions on the subject! This is dying men;—an example which you adduce to harden yourselves in vice; but which, if properly understood, is much calculated to excite alarm. We see, in general, that every dying man, however wicked he may have been during life, seems to be converted on the approach of death; and we readily persuade ourselves that it is so in effect: and consequently, that there is no great difficulty in becoming regenerate in our last moments. But two things have always prejudiced me against a late repentance;—the *characters*, and the *consequencs*.

First, the characters of this repentance. After acquiring some knowledge of the human heart, we fully perceive that there is nothing in it but what is extorted; that it is the fear of punishment, not the sentiments of religion and equity; that it is the approach of death, not an abhorrence of sin; that it is the terrors of hell, not the effusions of true zeal, which animate the heart. The sailor, while enjoying a favourable breeze, braves the Deity, uttering his blasphemies against Heaven, and apparently acknowledging no Providence but his profession and industry. The clouds become black; the sluices of heaven open; the lightnings flash in the air; the thunders become tremendous; the winds roar; the surge foams; the waves of the ocean seem to ascend to heaven; and heaven in turn seems to descend into

the abyss. Conscience, alarmed by these terrific objects, and more so by the image of hell, and the expectation of immediate and inevitable death, endeavours to humble itself before the pursuing vengeance of God. Blasphemy is changed to blessing, presumption to prayer, security to terror. This wicked man suddenly becomes a saint of the first class ; and, as though he would deceive the Deity, after having deceived himself, he arrogates, as the reward of this false reform, admission into heaven, and claims the whole rewards of true repentance.

What ! conversions of this kind dazzle Christians ! What ! sailors, whose tears and cries owe their origin to the presence of immediate danger, from which they would be saved ! But it is not in the agitation produced by peril, that we may know whether we have sincere recourse to God. It is in tranquil and recollected moments that the soul can best examine and investigate its real condition. It is not when the world has quitted us, that we should begin like true Christians to quit the world ; it is when the world smiles, and invites us to taste its charms.

What decides on those hasty resolutions are the consequences. Of all the saints that have been made in haste, you find scarcely one, on deliverance from danger, who fulfils the vows he has made. There is scarcely one who does not relapse into vice with the same rapidity with which he seemed to be saved ; a most conclusive argument, that such conversions are not sincere. Had it been true zeal, and divine love which dictated all those professions and kindled that fire which seemed to burn, you would, no doubt,

have retained the effects; but finding no fruit of your fervent resolutions, we ought to be convinced that they were extorted. Can your heart thus pass in one moment from two extremes? Can it pass in one moment from repentance to obduracy, and from obduracy to repentance? Can it correct in one moment habits of vice, and assume habits of piety; and renounce with equal ease habits of piety, to resume habits of vice? The case of infants, whom the Creator introduces into life, ought to correct your judgment, concerning those from whom he takes it away.

To all these proofs, my brethren, which I am not permitted to state in all their lustre, I fear lest another should soon be added;—I fear lest a fourth example should convince the world how dangerous it is to delay conversion. This proof, this example is no other than the major part of yourselves. On considering the way of life which most of you follow, we find but too much cause for this awful conjecture. But should we see you, without alarm, run headlong into the abyss from which you cannot be delivered by never-ceasing lamentations and tears? No, my brethren, we will redouble our entreaties, we will make fresh exertions to press on your minds these important truths.

#### APPLICATION.

The first thing we require of you is to enter into your own heart, to do justice to yourselves, to confess that most of you are in the awful situation we have attacked; that you are nearly all guilty of de-



laying conversion. I know that the human heart has its evasions, and that the conscience has its depths. But, after all, you are not infatuated to this excess: some of you are carried away with avarice, others with ambition; some with voluptuousness, others with slander; and some with a haughtiness which nothing can bend: living, as most of you do, resident in a city where you find all the temptations of vice in high life, and all the facility in the haunts of infamy, you are not so far blinded as to think that you are in a state of regeneration, while you persist in this course. And, as I supposed before, that no one of you is so far infatuated as to say, I have made my choice, I am resolved to cast myself headlong into the pit of destruction, and to be a victim of eternal vengeance; as no one of you has carried infatuation to this extreme, I am right in concluding, that nearly all of you rely on a future conversion. Begin here, begin by doing justice to yourselves on this point. This is the first thing we require you to do.

The second is, to recollect the arguments we have urged in our preceding discourses, against the delay of conversion, and confess their force. In the first we addressed you as well-informed and rational beings; we proved from the human constitution, that conversion becomes either difficult or impracticable in proportion as it is deferred. In the second, we addressed you as Christians, who acknowledge a revelation received from heaven; and we endeavoured to prove these truths by that revelation; by the character of the economy of the Holy Spirit; by the nature and conditions of the new covenant:—capital points

of faith, fundamental articles of religion, which you cannot evade, if you have the smallest shadow of Christianity. To-day we have directed all our efforts to enable you to comprehend the same things by clear, certain, and indisputable experience. Overlooking, therefore, every thing which concerns us in particular, and our weakness, which we acknowledge and feel, do justice to our proofs; acknowledge their force; and inquire, whether you have yet any thing further to object. Seek, examine, investigate. Is it not true, that bad habits become confirmed with age? Predominate in the heart? Take possession of all the intellectual powers, and transform themselves, so to speak, into our nature? Is it not true, that habits of piety are not acquired instantaneously, in a moment, by a sudden wish, and a simple emotion of the soul? Is it not true, that this detachment from sensible objects, this giving up the world, this self-denial, this zeal, this fervor, the indispensable duties of religion, the essential characters of a Christian, is it not true, that they are not the acquisitions of a moment, of an hour, of a day? Is it not true, that to attain this happy state, there must be time, labour, and repeated endeavours; consequently, that a transient thought on a death-bed, and in the last periods of life, is totally inadequate to so great a work? Is it not true, that the Holy Spirit, in extending his assistance, requires us to ask his aids, yield to his entreaties, and pay deference to his word? Is it not true, that he abandons to themselves those who resist his work; that it is thence concluded in the scripture that we need his grace for our sanctification; and that we ought to work

out our salvation with so much the more diligence ? Is it not true, that mercy has restrictions and bounds, that it is promised to those only who conform to the covenant of grace, that those conditions are not a momentary repentance, a slight recourse to mercy, a superficial desire to participate in the merits of Christ's death ? they imply such a total change, renovation of heart, and transformation of the soul, that when infirmities render us incapable of fulfilling those obligations, we may find ourselves within the sphere of evangelical promises. Is it not true, in short, that those truths are not founded merely on arguments, on a chain of consequences, and remote principles ? But they are demonstrated by sound and incontestable experience. Hence we ask you once more to admit the force of our arguments, and to do justice to the evidence we have adduced.

Thirdly, we also require you to acknowledge the inefficacy of sermons with regard to you, the little effect they commonly have, and consequently the little influence which ours (and especially those last delivered) have produced on your conduct. There is not a week, but some vice is attacked ;—not a week, but some one ought to be converted ;—not a week, but some evident change ought to be produced in civil and religious society. And what do we see ? I appeal to your consciences ; you regard us as declaimers, called to entertain you for an hour, to diversify your pleasure, or to pass away the first day of the week ; diverting your attention from secular concerns. It seems that we ascend our pulpits to afford you amusement, to delineate characters, implicitly

submitting to your judgment academic compositions ; to say “Come, come and see whether we have a fertile imagination, a fine voice, a graceful gesture, an action agreeable to your taste.” With these detestable notions most of you establish your tribunal, judging of the object of our sermons: which you sometimes find too long, sometimes too short, sometimes too cold, and sometimes too pathetic. Scarcely one among you turns them to their true design, purity of heart, and amendment of life. This is the success of the sermons you have heard. Are our discourses more happy? We should be too credulous did we expect it. It must be acknowledged, my brethren, that all we have said on the delay of conversion has been unavailing with regard to most of you. Philosophy, religion, experience,—all leave you much the same as you were before. This is the third thing you ought to confess.

When you have made these reflections, we will ask, what are your thoughts? What part will you take? What will you do? What will become of all the persons who compose this congregation? You know, on the one hand, that you are among the neglecters of salvation; you see, on the other, by evidence deduced from reason, Scripture and experience, that those who thus delay, run the risk of never being converted. You are obliged to allow, that the most pathetic exhortations are addressed, in general without effect; and, meanwhile, time is urgent, life vanishes away; and the moment in which you yourselves must furnish a test of these sad truths, is just at hand.—Do these things make any impression



on your mind? Do they attach any odium on the unhappy security in which you live? Do they trouble the false repose in which you rest? Have they any influence on your lives?

I know the part you are going to take, and we cannot think of it without horror; you are going to banish them from your mind, and efface them from your memory. You are going, on leaving this place, to fortify yourselves against this holy alarm, which has now, perhaps, been excited; you are going to talk of any subject but those important truths which have been preached, and to repose in indolence; to cause fear and trembling to subside, by banishing every idea which has excited them; like a man in a fatal sleep, while his house is on fire; we alarm him, we cry, "Rouse from your stupor, your house is on fire." He opens his eyes, he wishes to fly for safety; but falling again into his former lethargy, he becomes fuel to the flames.

My brethren, my very dear brethren, think, O think that the situation of your minds does not alter these grand truths. You *may forget* them, but you *cannot change* them. Whether you may think or not, they still exist in all their force. You may shut your eyes against hell, which is under your feet; but you cannot remove it, you cannot avoid it, so long as you disregard our warnings, and resist our entreaties.

If your salvation is dear to you, if you have yet the least sensibility, the smallest spark of love to God—if you have not resolved on your own ruin, and sworn to your own destruction, enter into your



hearts from this moment. Let each from this moment, take salutary measures to subdue his predominant propensity. Do not withdraw from this temple, without being firmly resolved on a change of life.

Consider that you were not sent into the world to aggrandise and enrich yourselves; to form attachments which serve as unhappy ties to hold you on the earth; much less to scandalize the church, to be high-spirited, proud, imperious, unjust, voluptuous, avaricious. God has placed you here in a state of probation, that you might become prepared for a better world. Consider, that, though the distractions of life may frequently call a wise man to be engaged in the world, in defiance of his wishes; yet there is nothing so unworthy as to be, like most of you, always dissipated, always devoted to pleasure. Consider, that though this vacuity of life might be excused in a youth following the impulse of nature, before he has had time to reflect, yet games, diversions, and theatres, do but ill accord with grey hairs; and that he, at least, should devote the rest of his life to the service of God, and the advancement of his own salvation.

Examine yourselves on these heads; let each make them the touchstone of his conduct; let him derive from them motives of reformation; let the time past suffice to have gratified his concupiscence; let him tremble on considering the wounds he has given his soul, and the dangers he has run, in delaying to the present hour.

Is it forty, fifty or sixty years since I came into the world? What have I been doing? What account can I give of a period so precious? What virtues have I acquired? What wicked propensities have I subdued? What progress have I made in charity, in humility, and in all the virtues for which God has given me birth? Have not a thousand various passions divided the empire of my heart? Have they not all tended to enslave me? O miserable man! perhaps my day of grace is past: perhaps in future I may knock in vain at the door of mercy: perhaps I may be numbered with those of whom Christ says, *Many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able*: perhaps the insensibility I feel, and the resistance which my unhappy heart still makes, are the effects of divine vengeance: perhaps my time of visitation is past: perhaps God spares me only in life to make me a fearful example of the misery of those, who delay conversion: perhaps it is to me he addresses that sentence, *Let him that is unjust be unjust still, and let him that is unholy be unholy still*. But, perhaps I have yet a little time: perhaps God has spared me in life to afford me occasion to repair my past faults: perhaps he has brought me to-day into this church to touch and save me from my sins: perhaps these emotions of my heart, these tears which run down mine eyes, are the effects of grace: perhaps these softenings, this compunction, and these fears are the voice which says, from God, *Seek ye my face*: perhaps this is the year of good-will; the accepted time; the day of salvation: perhaps if I delay no longer, if I promote my salvation without delay, I may suc-

ceed in the work, and see my endeavour gloriously crowned.

O love of my Saviour, bowels of mercy, abyss of divine compassion! *O length, breadth, height, depth of the love of God, which passeth knowledge!* resolve this weighty inquiry; calm the agitation of my mind; assure my wavering soul. Yes, O my God, seeing thou hast spared me in life, I trust it is for salvation. Seeing thou seekest me still, I flatter myself it is for my conversion. Hence I take new courage, I ratify anew the covenant I have so often violated; I pledge to thee anew the vows I have so often broken.

If you do so, you shall not labour in vain. For what is it that God requires of you? Why has he created you out of nothing? Why has he given you his Son? Why has he communicated to you his Holy Spirit? Is it to destroy you? Is it to damn you? Are you so little acquainted with the Father of mercies, with the God of love? Does he take pleasure in the death of the sinner? Would he not rather that he should repent and live?

These are the consolations which follow the exhortations of the prophet, and the words of my text. For after having said, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;* he draws this conclusion, to which I would lead you, as it has been the design of these three discourses, and by which I would close the subject. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.* And, lest the penitent sinner should be over-

burdened with the weight of his sins,—lest, estimating the extent of divine mercy by his own contracted views, he should despair of salvation, I will add this declaration from God himself, a declaration which admirably expresses the grandeur of his compassion ; *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ; for, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts.* Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

# SERMON IV.

*On Perseverance.*



HEBREWS xii. 1.

*Wherefore, seeing we are also compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

MY brethren, the Holy Spirit proposes to us in the words we have read, distinguished duties, excellent models, and wise precautions. *Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* These are the distinguished duties. *We are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.* These are the excellent models. *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.* These are the wise precautions.

I frankly acknowledge, my brethren, that on comparing the design of my text with the character of some among my hearers, I ought to suspend for a moment the thread of my discourse; lest the difficulty of success should deter me from attempting the execution. We are going to preach perseverance to men, of whom so great a number live in supineness and indolence, and to whom it is much more



proper to say, *Return unto the testimonies of the Lord, and continue to follow them.* We are going to propose the most excellent models, the example of the Abrahams, the Moseses, the Davids, of whom so great a number hitherto propose to themselves, if I may so express myself, only negative models; I would say, who make it all their glory in not being altogether so bad as the worst of the human kind; they consider themselves in some sort as saints, when they can allege some one who surpasses them in wickedness. In short, we are going to prescribe the best precautions to people, who expose both their flanks to the enemy of their salvation; and who in the midst of beings, leagued for our everlasting ruin, live in the same security as if the profoundest peace prevailed, and as if they were walking in the only way which leads to eternal felicity.

Again, when we consider people of this character, for whom we have so just a cause to fear destruction, we ought to enrol ourselves in the little number, that associating ourselves among the disciples of wisdom, according to the example of Jesus Christ, we might hope to say to God as he did, *Behold I, and the children which God hath given me*, Heb. ii. 13. and Isa. viii. 18. But when I consider the limits in which the greatest saints among us include their virtues, the scanty bounds which comprise their duties, I am afraid they will revolt against the doctrine of my text. And you, who carry piety to the highest degree, have you fully entered into the spirit of the exhortation which St. Paul addresses to you to-day? You, who on the pressing entreaties of Eternal Wis-

dom, which says, *give me thy heart*, labour with yourselves not to bestow on an only son sentiments which you owe solely to the giver, you have not yet carried divine love to the most eminent degree: it is not enough that you inspire your son with the fear and love of God, you must acquire the disposition of the father of the faithful, who obeyed this command; *Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering*, Gen. xxii. 2. You who, rather than abjure the truth, have sacrificed one part of your fortune, you have not carried divine love to the highest degree; you must acquire the disposition of those extraordinary men, some of whom were stoned for religion, others were sawn asunder, others were killed with the sword, others wandered about in sheep-skins, and in goat-skins, others were afflicted and tormented. These are the grand models, on which St. Paul wished to form the piety of the Hebrews, when he addressed them in the words of my text: it is on the same models we would wish to-day to form your piety. *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

These words may be considered in two different points of view, the one respects the Hebrews, to whom they were addressed, the other respects the whole Christian community.

1. They have peculiar references to the Hebrews, to whom they were addressed. These Hebrews had embraced Christianity, at a time of general exclama-

tion against the Christians. They were very sincere in the profession of Christianity; but there is a difference between the sincerity, and the constancy to which the disciples of Jesus Christ are called, particularly when the church seems abandoned to the fury of its persecutors. The grand design of the apostle, in this epistle, was to inspire them with this constancy, and to prevent the fear of punishments from causing them to fall into apostacy.

This design is apparent from the illustrious character he gives of the Lord Christ, to whom they had devoted themselves by embracing the Christian religion. He is not merely a man, not an ordinary prophet, not an angel; but the Lord of men, and of angels. *For God, says the apostle at the commencement of this epistle, who spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? Heb. i. 1—5.*

This design is further apparent, as the apostle apprizes the Hebrews concerning the difficulty, and even the impossibility of obtaining mercy after an abjuration accompanied with certain aggravating cir-

cumstances, which time does not permit me here to enumerate. The sense is asserted in these words: *It is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance,* Heb. vi. 4—6. To *fall away*, here signifies, not the repetition of a criminal habit we had hoped to reform, (and who could expect salvation if this was the meaning of the apostle?) but professing again the errors we had renounced on becoming Christians, and abjuring Christianity.

This design appears likewise, from the care the apostle takes to exalt the Christian economy above that of Moses: hence he infers, that if the smallest offences, committed against the Levitical economy, were punished with rigour, there cannot be punishments too severe for those who shall have the baseness to abjure Christianity. *If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.* Heb. x. 26, 27. The sin into which we wilfully fall, does not mean those relapses, of which we shall presently speak, as the ancient Fathers believed; whose severity was much more calculated to precipitate apostates into the abyss from which they wished to save them, than to preserve them from it. But to sin wilfully, in this place signifies apostacy: this is the sense of the words which immediately follow the passage. *He*



*that despised Moses' law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses ; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ?* Heb. x. 28, 29. The whole is descriptive of apostacy. The Jews, having prevailed with any of their nation who had embraced Christianity, to return to Judaism, were not satisfied with their abusing it ; they required them to utter blasphemies against the person of Jesus, and against his mysteries, as appears from the ancient forms of abjuration which the learned have preserved.

All these considerations, and many more, of which the subject is susceptible, demonstrate, that the grand design of St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, was to prevent apostacy, and to prompt them to confess the truth amidst the most cruel torments to which they might be exposed by the profession. This is the design of my text. *Let us run with patience the race that is set before us ;* that is, let neither persecutions the most severe, nor promises the most specious, be able to induce you to deny Christianity, nor any consideration deter you from professing it.

On this first design of the apostle, we shall merely conjure those, with whom there may remain some doubt as to the horrors of apostacy, and the necessity imposed on all Christians either to leave the places which prohibit the profession of the truth, or endure the severest tortures for religion ; we shall con-



jure them seriously to reflect on what we advance; not to content themselves with general notions; to compare the situation of those Hebrews with that in which some of the reformed Christians are placed; to compare the abjurations required of the first, with those required of the latter; the punishments inflicted on the one, with those inflicted on the other; and the directions St. Paul gave the faithful of his own time, with those which are given to us. If, after sober and serious investigation we still find casuists who doubt the doctrine, by affirming that those of our brethren, who still remain in France, ought to make their choice, between flight and martyrdom, we will add no more; feeling ourselves unable to persuade men, with whom arguments so strong are incapable of conviction.

Perhaps some of you think, that we insist too often on the same subjects. But we frankly avow, that, so very far from thinking we preach too often, it seems to us we by no means resume them sufficiently. We are also fully resolved to insist upon them more powerfully than we have ever done before. Yes! while we shall see the incendiaries of the Christian world, men, who under the name of the meek and lowly Jesus cherish the most ambitious and barbarous sentiments, holding the reins of government in so large a space of Europe, *making drunk*, if I may use an expression in the Revelation, and an expression by no means hyperbolical, *making drunk the kings of the earth with the wine of their fornication*: while we shall see edicts issued anew, which have so often made to blush every vestige of

probity in the community from which they proceed : while we shall see fresh faggots kindled, new gibbets erected, additional gallies equipped against the Protestants : while we see our unhappy brethren invariably negligent to the present period in which they promised to give glory to God, alleging, as an excuse, the severity of the persecution, and the fury of the persecutors ; that when peace shall be restored to the churches, they will return to devotion : while we see a million of men bearing the Christian name, contenting themselves to live without temple, without public worship, without sacraments, without hope of having on their death-beds the aids of ministers of the living God to comfort them against that terrific period : while we shall see fathers and mothers, so very far from sending into the land of liberty the children, whom they have had the weakness to retain in the climates of oppression, have even the laxity shall I say, or the insanity to recal those who have had courage to fly : while we shall see exiles looking back with regret to the onions of Egypt, envying the condition of those who have sacrificed the dictates of conscience to fortune : while we shall see those lamentable objects, we will enforce the doctrine of St. Paul in the epistle whence we have selected the text. We will enforce the expressions of the apostle, and in the sense already given. *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.—It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God,*

*and the powers of the world to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God, and put him to an open shame. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; for if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses ; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace. And in our text, Seeing we also. To what do these words refer ? To what the apostle had said a little before respecting the faithful, who, for the sake of religion had been stoned, had been sawn asunder, had been killed with the sword : after enumerating these, he adds, Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

2. Enough having been said concerning the first sense of the text which regards but few Christians, we shall proceed to the second ; which concerns the whole body of Christians, who are still in a world which endeavours to detach them from the communion of Jesus Christ. St. Paul exhorts them to *run with patience the race that is set before them* ; that is, to persevere in fellowship with him. Perseverance is a Christian virtue. On this virtue shall turn the

whole of our discourse, which shall be comprised under four classes of observations.

I. We shall remove what is equivocal in the term *perseverance*, or *running the race*.

II. We shall enforce the necessity of perseverance.

III. We shall remove certain systematical notions, which excite confusion in this virtue.

IV. We shall point to the different classes of persons who compose this congregation, the various consequences they should draw from this doctrine, and the sentiments with which it should actuate their minds.

I. We shall remove what is equivocal in the term *Perseverance*, and in the expression, *let us run with patience the race that is set before us*. . We may take the term in a double sense ; or to express myself more clearly, there are two ways in which we may consider the course prescribed by Jesus Christ to his disciples. We will call the first, losing the habit of Christianity ; and the second, doing actions incompatible with its design. By the habit of Christianity, we mean that disposition of a believer, in consequence of which, notwithstanding the weakness he may feel in virtue ;—the defect with which he may have cause to reproach himself ;—and the daily warfare between the flesh and the Spirit, or even some victories which the flesh may obtain over the mind ;—all things considered, he gives God the preference to the world and the flesh ; and has a consciousness in his own breast, that divine love prevails in his heart over every other love. We may also turn aside from the course prescribed by Jesus Christ to



his disciples, by doing things incompatible with the design of Christianity. It would discover a defective knowledge of man to conclude, that he has lost a habit the moment he does any action contrary to it. One act of dissipation no more constitutes a habit of dissipation, than a single duty of piety constitutes the habit of piety ; and we have no more reason for inferring, that, because a man has discovered one instance of attachment to the world, he is really earthly-minded, than we have to say that, because a man has discharged a single duty of piety, he is really a pious man. In what sense then, does the Holy Spirit exhort us to persevere ? Will he preserve us from doing any thing incompatible with the design of Christianity ? Will he preserve us from losing the habit ?

Doubtless, my brethren, his design is to preserve us from doing any thing contrary to the object of Christianity ; because it is by a repetition of this sort of actions that we lose what is called the habit of Christianity. That disposition of mind, however, which induces a Christian to fortify himself against every temptation, is a mean rather to obtain the grace of perseverance, than perseverance itself. When we say, according to inspired men, that, in order to be saved, we must endure to the end, we do not mean, that we should never in the course of life have committed a single fault ; but that, notwithstanding any fault we may have committed, we must be in the state just mentioned ; that, all things being considered, we give God the preference over sensible objects, and feel divine love in our hearts predomi-



nant over every other love. Where indeed should we be, if we could not be saved without undeviating perseverance, without running with patience the race in the vigorous sense, I would say, so as never to commit an action incompatible with the design of Christianity? Where should we be, were God to scrutinize our life with rigour; if he waited only for the first offence we commit, in order to plunge us into the abyss reserved for the wicked? Where would be the Jobs, the Moseses, the Davids, and all those distinguished offenders, whose memory the Holy Spirit has immortalized, to comfort us under our falls? One of the greatest motives to comply with a law is the lenity of the legislator: I will cite on this subject a passage of Justin Martyr: "How could Plato," says he "censure Homer for ascribing to the gods placability by the oblation of victims? Those who have this hope, are the very persons who endeavour to recover themselves by repentance and reformation: whereas, when they consider the Deity as an inexorable being, they abandon the reins of corruption, having no expectation of effect from repentance."

Distinguish then the virtue we enforce from one of the principal means of its acquisition. If you ask what is perseverance, I will answer, it is that disposition of mind which enables us, as I have more than once affirmed, and which is still necessary to repeat; it is that disposition of mind which enables us, all things considered, to give God the preference over every sensible object, that divine love may predominate in our heart over every other love. If

you ask me, what are the surest means of acquiring that disposition? I will say, it is to watch against every temptation to which you may be exposed. I will say, in order to preserve the habit of Christianity, you must use your utmost endeavours never to do any thing incompatible with its design.

II. Having removed the ambiguity of the term *perseverance*, we shall prove in the second article that we cannot be saved without this virtue.

1. The passage we have explained is not solitary. It is a passage which coincides with many other texts of scripture. The truth, resulting from the sense here given, is not a truth substantiated solely by the text. It is an explanation which a great number of express texts establish beyond the possibility of doubt. Weigh the following: *Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall*, 1 Cor. x. 12. *Thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold, therefore, the goodness and the severity of God: on them which fall, severity; but towards thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off*, Rom. xi. 20, 21, 22. *I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, that it might be well with them, and their children for ever*, Deut. v. 28, 29. *He that endureth unto the end shall be saved*, Matt. x. 22. *Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*, Rev. iii. 11. *Thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, the*

*righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression : as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness ; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I say to the righteous, that he shall surely live ; if he trust to his righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered ; but for his iniquity that he hath committed he shall die, Ezek. iii. xviii. xxxiii. 12, 13.* Such is the morality of our scriptures. Such is the vocation of the faithful. It is not enough that we keep, for a few years, the commandments of God : we must continue to keep them. It is not enough that we triumph for awhile over the old man, we must triumph to the end ; and if we have wandered by weakness for a season, we must steadfastly return to piety and religion.

2. Consider on what principle the Scripture characters founded their assurance of salvation. Was it on some abstract notions ? On some confused systems ? No : it was on the principle of persevering in the profession of their religion, and in the practice of virtue. I will adduce but one example, which seems to me above all exception : it is he, who, of all the sacred authors, has furnished us with the most conclusive arguments on the doctrine of assurance of salvation, and the inadmissibility of grace ; I would mention the example of St. Paul. He never doubted of his perseverance in piety, and in the profession of religion. The love of God was so deeply rooted in the heart of this apostle, as to remove all scruple on

that head. When, however, St. Paul, by abstraction of mind, considered himself as having lost the disposition which we shall call the habit of Christianity;—when he considered himself as falling under the temptations to which he was exposed from the flesh, hell, and the world;—what did he expect, considering his state in this point of view? What did he expect after the acquisition of so much knowledge; after preaching so many excellent sermons; after writing so many excellent and catholic epistles; after working so many miracles; after achieving so many labours; after encountering so many dangers; after enduring so many sufferings to exalt the glory of Christ; after setting so high an example to the church? What did he expect after all this? Paradise? The crown of righteousness? No: he expected hell and damnation. Did he expect that his past virtues would obtain the remission of his present defects? No: he expected that his past virtues would aggravate his present faults. *I count not myself to have apprehended*, Phil. iii. 13. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*, 1 Cor. ix. 27. In what situation did he place himself to lay hold of the crown of righteousness, and to obtain the prize? He placed himself at the close of his course. It was at the termination of life, that this athletic man exclaimed, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness*. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.



3. Consider what were the sentiments of the most distinguished Scripture characters, when they recollected themselves in those awful moments ; in which, after they had so far offended against divine love as to suppose the habit lost, or when their piety was so far eclipsed as to suppose it was vanished. Did they oppose past virtues to their present faults ? Hear those holy men, *O Lord, heal me ; for my bones are vexed : my soul is also sore vexed.* *Psa. vi. 2. Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as a heavy burden : they are too heavy for me.* *Psa. xxxviii. I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.* *Psa. li. 3, 11. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Cast me not away from thy presence ; restore me unto the joy of thy salvation. Will the Lord cast off forever ? And will he be favourable no more ? Is his mercy clean gone for ever ? Doth his promise fail for evermore ? Hath God forgotten to be gracious ? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies ?* *Psa. lxxvii. 8, 9, 10.* What ideas do these words excite in your minds ? Is it the presumptuous confidence which some men, unhappily called Christians, evince after committing the foulest offences ? Are these the sentiments merely of an individual, who, by a simple emotion of generosity and gratitude, reproaches himself for having insulted his benefactor ? Or are they sorrows arising in the soul from the fears of being deprived of those favours in future ? Magnanimous sentiments, doubtless are found in the characters of those distinguished saints. A repentance, founded solely on the fear of hell, can never obtain



a pardon: it may do well enough for a disciple of Loyola; but not for a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is respect for order; it is the love of God; it is sorrow for having offended a being we sincerely love, which is the basis of true repentance. It is fully apparent that the expressions you have heard, are the language of a soul persuaded of this truth; that we cannot obtain salvation without persevering till death in the habit of holiness, which it fears to have lost. They are the language of a soul, which reproaches itself, not only for a deviation from order; but which fears, lest it should have forfeited its salvation.

4. Consider the absurdities, arising from the opinion we attack. The commencement of a life sincerely consecrated to the service of God, is a sufficient barrier against all the fears arising from crimes with which it may in the issue be defiled. The children of God can never fall from grace. And none but the children of God can be sincerely consecrated to him in the early period of life. On this principle, I will frame you a system of religion the most relaxed, accommodating, and easy, and at the bar of corruption the most obstinate and inveterate. Consecrate sincerely to God a single hour of life. Distinguish by some virtue the sincerity of that early period. Then write with a pen of iron on a tablet of marble and brass, that, In such a day, and in such an hour, I had the marks of a true child of God. After that, plunge headlong into vice: run unbridled with the children of this world *to the same excess of riot*: give yourself no concern about your

passions : if the horrors of this state should excite any doubts of your salvation, comfort yourself against the anathemas of legal preachers ; comfort yourself against remorse of conscience, by casting your eyes on this tablet of brass and of marble ; monuments of the inamissibility of your faith and sure pledges of your salvation. But, my brethren, was this indeed the system of those saints of whom we have spoken ? They were not more convinced of this principle, that a sincerely good man cannot fall from grace, than of this which follows : that a man who cannot fall from grace, cannot fall from piety. They have trembled on doing an action contrary to piety ; fearing lest the habit was lost.

5. In a word, our last proof of the necessity of perseverance is founded on the necessity of progressive religion. It is a proposition already established on other occasions, that there is no precise period of virtue, at which we are allowed to stop. If a man should take for his model one of the faithful, whose piety is least of all suspected : if a man should propose to himself so fine a model, and there restrict his attainment, saying, *I will go so far, and no farther* ; such a man would have mistaken notions of religion. The Christian model is Jesus Christ. Perfection is the sole object of a Christian ; and the weaker he feels himself in its acquisition, the more should he redouble his exertions to approach it. Every period of life has its task assigned. The duties of youth will not dispense with those of riper age ; and the duties of riper age will not dispense with those of retiring life. *Be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is*

*perfect*, Matt. v. 48. This is the command of Jesus Christ. *Be perfect*, 2 Cor. xiii. 11. This is the precept of St. Paul. What do you infer from this principle? If we are condemned for not having advanced, what shall we be for having backslidden? If we are condemned for not having carried virtuous attainments to a more eminent degree, what shall we be for having debased them to a degree so far below the standard?

III. But a doctrine of our churches seems to frustrate all our endeavours to prompt you to perseverance, and to warn you that salvation is reserved solely for those who do persevere. It is this. We fully believe, that the most illustrious saints were guilty of offences, directly opposed to Christianity; but we profess to believe, that it was impossible, they should lose the habit. We fully admit the propriety of exhorting them not to commit those faults which it is impossible they should commit. But why exhort them, not to retain a habit which they cannot lose? Where is the propriety of alarming them with a destruction on the brink of which grace shall make them perfect? This is the difficulty we wish to solve; and this is the design of our third head.

But I would indeed wish to illustrate the subject without reviving the controversies it has excited. I would wish conformably to the views of a Christian, (from which especially a gospel minister should never deviate,) to associate, as far as the subject will admit, peace and truth. If the wish is not chimerical, we cannot I think, better succeed than by availing ourselves of a point unanimously allowed by the

divines divided on this subject, in order to harmonize what seems calculated still to divide them.

It is a received maxim in every system, I would say in every system of those who are divided on the doctrine of the inamissibility of grace ; that, to preserve the habit of holiness, without which they unanimously agree we cannot be saved, we must use all the means prescribed in the sacred Scripture to preserve so valuable a disposition. Divines, whom difference of opinion has irritated against one another, reciprocally accuse their brethren of weakening this principle ; but there is not one among them who does not sincerely embrace it, and complain of the reproach, when charged with having rejected it. Those who exclaim against the doctrine of the inamissibility of grace, are so far from rejecting it, that they pretend to be the only persons who establish it upon a sure foundation ; and maintain that it cannot exist in systems opposed to the first. They say, that the doctrine of the inamissibility of grace is so far from opposing this principle, that it constitutes its foundation. And who among the advocates for this doctrine, ever affirmed that we can preserve the grace of perseverance, if we frequent the haunts of infamy ; —if we keep company with persons who tempt us to adultery and voluptuousness, and so with regard to other virtues ? It is then a principle such as I ought to seek. It is a principle inculcated by every system, that in order to retain the habit of holiness, without which it is impossible to be saved, we must use all the means pointed out in the sacred Scrip-



tures for the preservation of such an invaluable temper of heart.

This being granted, it is requisite in every system, to represent the calamities we incur by losing the habit of holiness ; because it is the dread of incurring the calamities consequent on our fall, which the Scriptures point out as the most usual and powerful preservatives from apostacy. Hence they exhort us to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. Hence they make one part of a good man's happiness to consist in *fearing always*. Hence they require us to *rejoice with trembling*. Each of you may collect a variety of parallel passages.

Our divines, to illustrate this subject, have sometimes employed a comparison, which, in my opinion, is well calculated to answer their purpose. It is that of a wise man at the top of a tower, who has all the necessary means of preserving himself from falling into the abyss open to his view. We may properly say, it is impossible such a man should fall. Why ? Because, being a prudent man, and having all the necessary means, it is impossible his prudence should not prompt him to avail himself of their support. But in what consists one part of this means of safety ? It is the faculty suggested by his prudence, of knowing, and never forgetting the risk he runs, should he neglect the means of safety. Thus fear, so circumstanced, is one part of his safety, and his safety is inseparable from his fear. The application of this comparison is easy ; every one may make it without difficulty. It is sufficient, not indeed to remove all the difficulties of which the loss of grace is suscepti-



ble ; but to answer the objection I have made of its being useless, on a supposition of the impossibility of falling from grace, to warn a real Christian of the calamities he may incur, should he lose his habit of piety.

IV. Three classes of people have consequences to deduce from the doctrine we have advanced. We shall first address ourselves to those who seem least of all interested ; I would say, those who have no cause to fear falling from grace ; not because they are established, but because they never entertained sincere resolutions of conversion. If people of this description would pay serious attention to their state ; if they would read the scriptures with recollection ; if they would listen to our sermons with a real, not a vague and superficial design of reducing them to practice, I think the doctrine we have delivered would rouse them from their indolence ; I think it would hinder them from going so intensely into the world on withdrawing from devotion, as not to hear the voice of their conscience. What ! the people of whom we speak should say, What ! Christians of the first class ; what ! those distinguished saints who have devoted the whole of their life to duty ; what ! those who have *wrought out their salvation with fear and trembling*, can they promise themselves nothing from past efforts ? What ! are all the sacrifices they have made for Christianity useless, unless they persevere in piety ; and, for having failed to run only a few steps of their course, will they fail of obtaining the prize promised to those only who finish the whole ? And I, miserable wretch, who am so far

from being the first of saints, that I am the chief of sinners ;—I, who am so far from having run the race which Christ hath set before his disciples, as to have put it far away ;—I, who have been so far from working out my salvation, as to have laboured only by slander, by calumny, by perjury, by blasphemy, by fornication, by adultery, by drunkenness ;—I, who have done nothing but obstructed the work, yet I am composed, I am tranquil ! Whence proceeds this peace ? Does it not proceed solely from this circumstance, that, my sins having constrained the Deity to prepare the sentence of my eternal condemnation, he has (among the calamities prepared for me by his justice) the fatal condescension to make me become insensible of my misery, lest I should anticipate my condemnation, by the dreadful torments which the certainty of being damned would excite in my soul. Oh, dreadful calm ! fatal peace ! tranquillity to which despair itself is preferable, if there be any thing preferable in despair ! Oh ! rather, thou sword of divine vengeance brandish before my eyes all thy terrors ! Array in battle against me all the terrors of the mighty God, as in the awful day of judgment ; and striking my soul with the greatness of my misery, give me, at least if there be time, to emancipate myself ! If there be yet time ? And, if there be *not* time, why do you yet breathe ? Why are there still open to you the gates of this temple ? Why is the gospel still preached, if it is not that you may be recollected ; if it is not that you may renounce the principles of your past folly ; if it is not that you may yield to calls of grace, which pub-

lish to you the consoling declarations of the merciful God? *When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge; give again that he hath robbed, walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him.* Ezek. xxxiii. 14, 15, 16.

A second sort of people, who ought to derive serious instruction from the words of my text, is those visionaries, who, while engaged in the habit of hating their neighbours, of fornication, of revenge, or in one or the other of those vices, of which the Scripture says, *they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, fancy themselves to be in a state of grace, and believe they shall ever abide in that state, provided they never doubt of the work. People of this character, whether they have fallen into the hands of antinomian guides, one of the greatest plagues with which justice punishes the crimes of men, and one of the most awful pests of the church;—whether it be the effect of those passions, which in general so fascinate the mind as to prevent their seeing the most evident truths opposed to their system;—people of this class presumptuously apply to themselves the doctrine of the inamissibility of grace, at the time when we display the arm of God ready to pour the thunder of its vengeance upon their heads. Know then once for all, it is not to you that the inamissibility of grace belongs. Whether a true saint may fall, or whether he may not fall,

it is the same thing with regard to you; and your corruption will gain nothing by the decision: for if the true saint may fall, I have cause to conclude that you are already fallen, since, notwithstanding the regeneration you pretend to have received, you now have no marks of real saints; and if a real saint cannot fall, I have cause to conclude that you were deluded in the notion you have formed of yourselves with regard to conversion. I have reason to believe that you never were true saints, because I see with my own eyes, that you no longer sustain the character. Here is an abridgment of the controversy. Here is a decision of the question between us. But if it do not agree with your systems, preserve those systems carefully; preserve them to the great day, when the Lord shall render to every man according to his works; and endeavour,—endeavour in the presence of the Judge of all the earth, to defend your depravity by your opinions.

There is, in short, a third class of people, who ought to make serious reflections on the doctrine of perseverance. It is those who carry the consequences to an extreme; who, from a notion that they must endure to the end of their course, to be saved, persuade themselves that they cannot be assured of their salvation till they come to that period. It is not to ministers who maintain so detestable a notion, that this article is addressed. It is not to captious, but to tender minds, and those tender minds who are divided between the exalted ideas they entertain of duty, and the fears of deviation. Fear, holy souls; but sanctify your fear. Entertain ex-



alted views of your duty; but let those exalted views be a sure test that you will never deviate: and, while you never lose sight of difficulties with which the race Christ hath set before you is accompanied, never lose sight of those objects which he hath set before you, in order that you may be enabled to surmount them.

A Christian is supported in his course by the very nature of the difficulties which occur. These are many, and we shall have occasion to enumerate them in a subsequent discourse. But, with discerning Christians, all these things may promote the end they seem to oppose, and realize the words of St. Paul, *all things work together for good to them that love God*, Rom. viii. 28. One of those difficulties, for instance, to which a Christian is exposed in his race, is adversity; but adversity is so far from obstructing him in his course, as to become an additional motive to pursue it with delight; and assist him in taking an unreluctant flight towards the skies. Another difficulty is prosperity; but prosperity assists him to estimate the goodness of God, and induces him to infer, that if his happiness here be so abundant, what must it be in the mansions of felicity, seeing he already enjoys so much in these abodes of misery. Another of those difficulties is health; which, by invigorating the body, strengthens the propensity to sin; health, by invigorating the body, strengthens him also for the service of God. So it is with every obstruction.

A Christian is supported in his course, by those unspeakable joys which he finds in the advancement



of his progress ; by *the peace which passeth all understanding* ; by the serenity of justification ; by an anticipated resurrection ; by a foretaste of paradise and glory, which descend into his soul, before he himself is exalted to heaven.

A Christian is supported in his course, (as we have already intimated in this sermon,) by the consideration even of those torments, to which he would be exposed if he should come short. The patriarch Noah trembled, no doubt, on seeing the sluices of heaven let loose, and the fountains of the great deep broke open ; and the angry God execute this threatening, *I will destroy man whom I have created, from off the face of the earth ; both man and beast, for it repenteth me that I have made them*, Gen. vi. 7. But this fear apprised him of his privilege, being exempt in the ark from the universal desolation ; which induced him to abide in his refuge.

A Christian is supported in his course by supernatural aids, which raise him above the powers of nature ; which enable him to say, *when I am weak, then I am strong* ; and to exclaim in the midst of conflicts, *blessed be God which alway causeth us to triumph in Christ*, 2 Cor. ii. 14. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 13.

A Christian is supported in his course by the confidence he has of succeeding in the work in which he is engaged, and of holding out to the end. And where is the man in social life, who can have the like assurance with regard to the things of this world ? Where is the general, who can assure himself of success by the dispositions he may make to obtain the vic-

tory ? Where is the statesman, who can assure himself of warding off every blow which threatens the nation ? The Christian,—the Christian alone has this superior assurance.—I fear nothing but your heart ; answer me with your heart ; answer me with your sincerity, and I will answer you for all the rest.

A Christian is supported in his course, above all, by the grandeur of the salvation with which he is to be crowned. What shall I say, my dear brethren, on the grandeur of this salvation ? That I have not the secret of compressing into the last words of a discourse all the traits of an object, the immensity of which shall absorb our thoughts and reflections to all eternity !

With such vast support, timorous soul, shalt thou still be agitated with those distressing fears which discourage wicked men from entering on the course prescribed by Jesus Christ to his disciples ? *Fear not thou worm Jacob, for I am with thee. Thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. They that are for us, are more than all they that are against us,* 2 Kings vi. 16. *When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned,* Isa. xliii. 2. To this adorable Deity, who opens to us so fine a course, who affords us such abundant means for its completion, be honour, glory, empire, and magnificence, now and ever. Amen.

# SERMON V.

*On the Example of the Saints.*



HEBREWS xii. 1.

*Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

**T**HERE are few persons so very depraved, as not to admire the line of life prescribed by religion ; but there are few sufficiently virtuous to follow it or even to consider it in any other light than as a grand scheme captivating to an enlightened mind, but to which it is impossible to conform. Reason, as soon as we are capable of contemplating the Being who gave us birth, yields to a world of arguments which attest his existence and perfections ; it joins the concert of creation which publishes his glory ; it devotes itself to him to whom we are indebted for all our comforts ; it makes continual efforts to pierce those veils, which conceal him from our view, and seeks a more concise and sure way of knowing him than that of nature : it receives revelation with avidity ; adores the characters of divine perfections which it traces ; takes them for a rule of life ; sighs on deviation from

those models of perfection, and repairs, by revigorated efforts of virtue, the faults it had committed against virtue. Here is the line of life prescribed by religion. And who is so depraved, as not to admire it? But who is so virtuous as to follow it, or even to believe that it can be followed? We look upon it, for the most part, as we do the notions of an ancient philosopher respecting government. The principles, on which he established his system of politics, have appeared admirable, and the consequences he has deduced, have appeared like streams pure as their source. God in creating men, says this philosopher, gave them all means of preservation from the miseries which seem appendant to their condition: and they have but themselves to blame if they neglect to profit by them. His bounty has supplied them with resources to terminate the evils into which they fell by choice. Let them return to the practice of truth, and virtue, from which they have deviated, and they shall find that felicity to which nothing but virtue and truth can conduct society. Let the states elect a sovereign like the God who governed in the age of innocence: let them obey the laws of this sovereign, as they formerly obeyed the laws of God. Let kings, and subjects, enter into the same views of making each other mutually happy. The whole world has admired this fine notion; but they have only admired it: and regard it merely as a system. The princes and the people, to whom this philosopher wrote are, as yet unborn; hence we commonly say, *the republic of Plato*, when we wish to express a beautiful chimera. I blush to acknowledge, but truth extorts



it from me, that this is the notion most men entertain of religion. They make its very beauty an argument for its neglect, and their own weakness an apology for the repugnance they feel in submitting to its laws: this is precisely the temper we propose to attack. We will prove by evident facts, and by experience which is consequently above all exception, that however elevated above the condition of man the scheme of religion may appear, it is a scheme which may be followed, seeing it has been followed already.

To this point we shall direct the subsequent part of our discourse on the text we have read. We have divided it into three parts;—distinguished duties,—excellent models,—and wise precautions. Of distinguished duties, *let us run with patience the race that is set before us*, we have treated in our first discourse. Of wise precautions, *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us*, we hope to treat in a succeeding sermon. Of excellent models, *seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses*, we shall speak to-day. Happy, if struck with so many heroic actions, you may be led to follow them, and to augment this cloud of witnesses, of whom the Holy Spirit himself has not disdained to make the eulogium. Happy, if we may say of you, as we now say of them, by faith they repelled the wisdom of this world; by faith they triumphed over the charms of concupiscence; by faith they endured the most cruel of torments; by faith they conquered the celestial Jerusalem, which was the vast reward of all their conflicts. Amen.



*Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race which is set before us.* What is this cloud, or multitude, of which the apostle speaks? The answer is not equivocal, they are the faithful enumerated in the preceding chapter. Of what were they witnesses? Of that important truth, with which he would impress the mind of the Hebrews, and which alone is capable of supporting the expectation of martyrdom, that *God is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him*; that how great soever the sacrifices may be we make for him, we shall be amply recompensed by his equity or love: the faithful have witnessed this; not only by their professions, but by their conduct; some by sacrifices which cost the most to flesh and blood; some by abandoning their riches; others by devoting their lives. Happily, this eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is clearly known even to the less instructed of our hearers; this may supply our weakness, and the brevity of these exercises in making an analysis. We shall run over it, remarking whatever may most contribute to illustrate the subject.

The first thing which not a little surprises us, is, that St. Paul has equally brought together, as models, men who seem to have been not only of very different, but of very opposite conduct. How could he class Samson, the victim of a prostitute: how could he class Rahab, of whom it is doubtful at least, whether she did not practise the most infamous of all professions; how could he put those two persons on a parallel with Joseph, who has been held up to

all ages, not only as a model, but as the martyr for chastity? How could he place Jephthah, the oppressor of Ephraim, whom we deem worthy of censure for the most distinguished action of all his life; I would say the devotion of his only daughter, either to sacrifice or celibacy, a question not to be examined here; how could he class this man in a rank with Abraham, who was ready to immolate his son at the divine command; with Abraham, the most humane of conquerors, who made this magnanimous reply to the offers of an alliance he had received, *I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from thee a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich?* Gen. xiv. 22, 23. How could he put Gideon, who availed himself of the spoils of Midian by the supernatural aids of Heaven, to make an ephod, and to turn away the Israelites from the worship of the true God, on a scale with Moses, who chose affliction with the people of God, in preference to *the pleasures of sin which are but for a season?* Heb. xi. 25. I have too much reason to be convinced, that many of my hearers would wish to follow models of this description. I have too much reason to be convinced, that many would delight in a faith like that of Samson, like that of Jephthah, like that of Gideon. Without adopting or rejecting the solutions usually given of this difficulty, here is what may be replied.

You should keep in view, the design of St. Paul in placing this group of personages before the He-

brews. He would animate them with that faith, which as we expressed ourselves relying on the apostolic principles, with that faith which persuades us, that how great soever the sacrifices may be we make for God, we shall be rewarded by his equity or love. Faith thus taken in its vaguest and most extended view, ought to be restricted to those particular circumstances in which it was exercised, and according to the particular kind of promises which it embraced, or, not losing sight of obedience, in regard to those particular kinds of sacrifice which he requires us to make. One man is called to march at the head of an oppressed nation and to emancipate his country. God promises to reward his courage with victory. The man believes, he fights, he conquers. The object of his faith in this particular circumstance, is the promise I have mentioned ; I am right then in defining faith as Saint Paul when he says, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* Heb. xi. 1. It is that disposition of heart, in approaching God, which enables us to believe, that he *is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* By faith the man of whom I spoke obtained the victory.

But I will adduce the case of another, called to suffer martyrdom for religion. The particular objects of his faith in the case I have supposed, are the promises of salvation. I am right in defining faith as it is defined by St. Paul, when he says, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* It is that disposition of mind which enables him in approaching God, to believe that *he is the re-*

warder of all them that diligently seek him. By faith the man of whom I speak obtained salvation.

You perceive, I flatter myself, in the first case I have adduced, that if the general persuasion this man had, that God is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him, did not embrace for its object all the promises of salvation, nor induce him to make all the sacrifices his salvation required ; he is worthy however of imitation in this instance, his faith having embraced the particular promise which had been given him : and it is evident, if I know any thing of this man's life, that his faith having been sufficiently strong for a particular sacrifice I may presume what I cannot prove, it would have been adequate for every other sacrifice required by his salvation.

The doctrine discussed being considered, not only obviates the difficulty proposed, but satisfies the scruple which may be made concerning some of the saints proposed as patterns by St. Paul.

Do you ask, why Saint Paul has arranged in the same class, and propose as equal models, personages so distinguished by vice ? I answer, that whatever distance there might have been between the different personages, they are all worthy of imitation in regard to what is excellent in those instances to which the apostle refers.

But if you ask whether the faith which induced Samson, Jephthah, and Gideon, to make some particular sacrifices for God, prompted them to make every sacrifice which their salvation required ? we answer, that whatever favourable presumption charity ought to inspire, no man has a right to answer the



question in the affirmative : as we find many who have performed the first miracles of faith without performing the second, we ought not to be confident that those doubtful characters performed the second because they were honoured with the first.

But if you exclaim against this opinion, I will add, not only that Jesus Christ has affirmed he will say to many in the great day, who had miraculous faith, *I know you not* ; but we have proof that many of those, whose example the apostle has adduced in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, were detestable characters, notwithstanding their endowment of miraculous faith. Here is our proof : he has arranged, in the class of those whose faith he extols, all the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea. Now, it is evident that a vast proportion of these were detestable men ; then, draw yourselves the consequence. And here you have the reason of St. Paul having happily proposed to the Hebrews, the examples of the miracles achieved by the faith of those whom I call doubtful characters. Those miracles were admirably calculated to encourage the minds of the Hebrews, and to embolden their purposes of making distinguished sacrifices for religion : but you have the reason, also, of his not being satisfied with merely setting before them those examples. You have the reason of his not being satisfied with setting before them the example of a faith, concerning which the Scriptures are silent, if it had only particular promises for its object ; he sets before them the example of those saints, whose faith had particularly in view the promises of eternal feli-



city. But were there, indeed, among those saints enumerated by the apostle, men, whose faith had, for its object, the promises of eternal felicity? Did the obscurity of the dispensation, in which they lived, permit them to pierce the veil, which still concealed from their view a happier life than they enjoyed on earth? Let us not doubt it, my brethren: to avoid one extreme; let us not fall into the opposite one. St. Paul has proved it, not only by his own authority, but also by the nature of the case, and by the testimony of the Jews of his own age.

From the example of the patriarchs, he adduces, first that of Abel. An ancient tradition of the Jews informs us, that the subject of dispute, between him and Cain, turned on the doctrine of future rewards. Cain maintained that none were to be expected in a future life; Abel supported the contrary proposition. The former of those brothers supplied argument by violence; unable to convince Abel, he assassinated him. It is from this tradition that some of our learned think we ought to understand those words of the apostle, *who being dead yet speaketh*. They translate, "We have still extant a tradition, that he died for this faith; namely, the doctrine of a future state."

He cites the example of Enoch, who was so powerfully persuaded of a life to come, as to obtain a translation, exempting him from the painful path which others must travel to glory; I would say, from tasting the horrors of death.

He adduces the example of Noah, who not only escaped the calamities of the deluge, but *became heir*

*of the righteousness which is by faith.* What is this heritage of righteousness by faith? It is according to the style of the sacred authors, eternal life. Hence the many parallel explications we find in other places; as in the first chapter of this epistle. *Are not the angels all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?* That, also, in the second chapter of the catholic epistle of St. James, *God hath chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him.*

He further alleges the example of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of Joseph. The confidence which the patriarchs reposed in the promise of an earthly Canaan, proves that they expected a heavenly inheritance; because they continued faithful followers of God, though they never inherited the terrestrial country, which was apparently promised to them, but continued to be *strangers and sojourners.* *I am,* says Abraham to the Egyptians, *a stranger among you.* And Jacob to Pharaoh, *The days of my pilgrimage,*—or the time of my life, during which period I have been a stranger and a sojourner:—*the days of my pilgrimage are not equal to those of my fathers,* St. Paul's remark on these expressions of the patriarchs is worthy of regard. *They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.* And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned; but now they seek a better country; that is an heavenly, Heb. xi. 14, 15, 16. That is to say, those holy men, could but consider

two sorts of countries as their own, either the land of their fathers, or the land of Canaan, of which God had promised to give them possession. They had not this notion of the land of Canaan, seeing they considered themselves as *strangers and sojourners*;—seeing that Abraham there possessed only so much land, as was sufficient for a sepulchre;—seeing Joseph's sole happiness, in this view, was to command his children to carry up his bones, when they went to possess it. They could no longer consider Chaldea, in which their fathers were born, as their country: in that case, they would have returned on finding themselves strangers in the land of Canaan. Hence it is evident from their conduct that they still sought a country, a better than their fathers, and a better than their children expected to possess; *They showed that they expected a better, that is an heavenly.*

St. Paul adduces to the Hebrews the example of Moses: for if the faith of Moses merely respected terrestrial glory, why should he (as the Jews say,) have cast to the ground, and trampled on the crown Tharmutis had placed on his head? Why should he on coming to years, as says the apostle, have *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*. He further, according to the same apostle, *esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt*. This expression may be taken in a double sense. By *the reproach of Christ*, we may understand the cross he so frequently inculcated on his disciples. By the reproach of Christ, we may likewise understand the bondage which oppressed the

Jews in the time of Moses. The word Christ, signifies anointed, and men favoured of God are frequently called his anointed, because of the grace they had received; of which the holy oil, poured on some extraordinary personages by his command, was a figure. So God has said by the Psalmist, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm*, Psa. cv. 15. So the prophet Habbakuk, *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed*, Hab. iii. 13. Which sense soever we may adopt, the afflictions of Moses prove, according to St. Paul, *that he had respect unto the recompense of the reward*, Heb. xi. 26. As no motive but the hope of glory can induce Christians to bear the reproach of Christ their head; so no other consideration could have induced a preference in Moses, of the sufferings of the Israelites to the enjoyments of a crown.

In short, St. Paul adduces to the Hebrews a great number of martyrs; who sacrificed their lives for their religion. In this class is the venerable Eleazer; who died under the strokes of his executioners, 2 Maccab. vi. It is probably in allusion to this case when the apostle says, *they were tortured*. The Greek word signifies they were extended in torture: it is designed to express the situation of persons executed in this cruel way. In this class is Zechariah, who was slain between the temple and the altar, by the command of Joash. To him the apostle properly alludes when he says, *they were stoned*. In this class is Isaiah, whom Manasseh executed with a saw, if we may credit an apocryphal book quoted by Ori-



gin. To him the apostle probably alludes when he says, *they were sawn asunder*. In this class were Micah, John the Baptist, and St. James, since the time of the Maccabees. In all probability the apostle had them in view when he says, *they were slain with the sword*. This is sufficient to illustrate what St. Paul has said in the chapter preceding our text, respecting the faithful, whom he adduces as models. It is evident, that those illustrious examples were admirably calculated to make deep impressions on the minds of the Hebrews, and to animate them to sacrifice their lives for their religion, if called to suffer. But I would improve the precious moments of attention you may yet deign to give, having destined them to investigate the impression, which the examples of those illustrious saints must naturally make on our minds, and to press the exhortation, *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us*.

I have too high an opinion of my hearers, not to persuade myself, that they cannot contemplate those illustrious models, without corresponding impressions; but I think enough has been said to foresee an objection which most of you will make, should I devote the rest of the hour to enforce those high examples. You will say, they are too distinguished for our imitation. The personages, from whom they are derived, were extraordinary men, with whom we have no claims of competition. *They were saints, we are sinners*. Hence, the more amiable these examples appear, the less you conceive yourselves obligated to



make them the model of your life. I would wish to go to the source of this evil: hence, instead of confining myself to an eulogium on those sacred characters, I would prove, that they were men like you, in order that you may be saints like them. There is between them and you a similarity of nature—a similarity of vocation—a similarity of temptations—a similarity of motives—a similarity of assistance.—The sole difference between you is, that they had a sincere determination to prefer their salvation and duty to every other consideration: whereas you prefer a thousand things to your salvation. This is the awful difference I would now remove, in order to disclose the perfect parallel between you and those illustrious characters.

I. There is between those saints and you *a similarity of nature*; I mean they had the same principles of natural depravity. There is, I grant, much confusion respecting some notions termed in the schools, Original Sin. It has too often happened, in opposing this doctrine to certain blasphemous objections against the divine justice, that they have strengthened the objections they endeavoured to obviate. On the other hand, it is extremely astonishing that there should be any divines so unacquainted with human nature, as to deny our being all born with those principles of depravity. Two considerations will demonstrate the fallacy of this notion.

1. Man, circumscribed in knowledge, and exposed to strong temptations, which cannot be supported without a vast chain of abstract truth, is very liable to entertain this notion, I say not that it is impossi-

ble to avoid it; but that he is very liable to entertain this notion. It may be avoided; because, in the hour of temptation, he may turn his views to those motives, which would enable him to obtain the victory. He is, however, very liable to fall; because powerful temptation engrosses so large a proportion of the mental capacity, that it is difficult for a man thus prepossessed to pay proper attention to the motives which would enable him to conquer.

2. We are not only all born with a general propensity to vice; but we are all likewise born with a propensity to some particular vice. Let a man pay attention to children in the early years of life, and he will be convinced of the fact: he will see that one is born with a propensity to anger, another to vanity, and so with regard to the other vices. These propensities sometimes proceed from the temperature of our bodies. It is natural, that persons born with a phlegmatic constitution, and whose spirits flow with difficulty, should be inclined to insensibility, to indolence, and effeminacy. It is natural also for persons born with a gay and volatile temperature, to be inclined to pleasure, and anger. But these dispositions are sometimes found in the essence of the soul. For, why are some men born jealous, and ambitious? Why have they peculiar propensities which have no connexion with the body, if there be not, in the essence of the soul, principles which impel some to one, and some to another vice?

This being granted, I affirm, that there is between those distinguished saints, namely, those venerable personages enumerated by St. Paul in the eleventh

chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews,—that there is, between them and us, *a similarity of nature*. They had principles of depravity in common with us. The sole difference between them and us is, that they counteracted, and endeavoured to eradicate those principles; whereas we suffer them to predominate and superadd the force of habit to the infirmity of nature.

1. That those distinguished men were born with an understanding circumscribed as ours, requires no proof. Seeing they have resisted the temptations into which our limited understanding has permitted us to fall; it evidently follows, that the difference between them and us is, that when the objects of temptations were presented, they endeavoured to spurn them, and fix their thoughts on the motives which enabled them to triumph; but we suffer those objects entirely to engross the capacity of our souls.

2. Those distinguished men were born, as we are, with certain propensities to some particular vices. There were in the disposition of their bodies, and in the essence of their souls, as in ours, certain seeds, which prompted some to one vice, and some to another. The history of those saints is too concise to state this truth in all its lustre; but it is so far known as to be evident to a certain degree. Moses was naturally of a warm temper: witness his remonstrances with God when commanded to speak to Pharaoh: witness his indignation when he broke both the tables of the law; and when he struck the rock twice. David was born with a lascivious disposition: witness his intercourse with Bathsheba. He was born

with a vindictive temper : witness the hasty resolution he formed against Nabal, and accompanied with an oath so unbecoming a saint. *So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertaineth unto him by the morning light, either man or beast, 1 Sam. xxv. 22.* What we have said of David, and of Moses, we might confirm by other saints. Hence, if the love of God was predominant, in the soul of those illustrious saints, over corruption, while corruption in us so frequently predominates over the love of God:—if they *ran with patience the race set before them* ; whilst we are so frequently interrupted in the course:—it was not because those saints were not born with the same principles of depravity which prompt us to particular sins ; but because we abandon ourselves to those principles, and make no efforts to oppose them : whereas they struggled hard lest they should commit the crimes, to which they were inclined by nature.

II. There is between those illustrious saints and us, *a similarity of vocation.* Does this article require proof ? Can you be so little acquainted with religion, as to suppose that they were called to make a constant progress in holiness, but that you are called only to a certain degree of virtue ? That they were called to give victorious effect to the love of God over depravity, and that you are called to permit depravity to predominate over the love of God ? That they were called to a habit, and a constant habit of piety, but that God merely requires you to do a few virtuous actions, to acquire a temporary habit of holiness, and then allows you to lay it aside ?



Is not the law equal ? Are not you called to be holy as they were holy ? Is it not said to you, as well as to them, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*, Matt. v. 48. The abridgement of the law, and the prophets,—is it not of the same force with regard to you, as to them, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ?* Matt. xxii. 37.

I am fully aware, that there is a difference between the effects of the love which God requires of you, and which he required of them : but that does not suppose any change in the efficient cause. The efficient cause must be the same, how diversified soever the effects may be ; and if you are not called to make similar sacrifices, you are called to be ready to do so, should they be required. You are not called, like Abraham, to immolate in sacrifice to God your only son ; but you are called to have the same radical attachment and preference, which induced him to sacrifice his son, if required by your maker. And if you have not this profound attachment, or at least, if you do not daily endeavour to obtain it, deceive not yourselves, my brethren, you can have no hope of salvation. You are not called, like Moses, to sacrifice a crown for religion, but you are called to have the same preference and esteem for God which he had, provided a crown were offered. If you have not this preference of affection ; at least, if you do not endeavour to obtain it, deceive not yourselves, my brethren ; you can have no hope of salvation. The difference, between those illustrious saints and us, is not in the variety of vocation in which Provi-



dence has called us, but in the manner of our obedience. They understood their vocation, and were obedient ; but we overlook it, or take as much pains to disguise it, as they did to know it ; and when they constrain us to know it, and our conscience is constrained to discover its duty, we violate in practice those very maxims, we have been obliged to acknowledge in theory.

III. Human depravity has not only innumerable subtleties, but we even urge them. Sometimes, in order to excuse our deviations from those illustrious saints, we allege the superiority of their temptations over those, to which Providence has exposed us ; and sometimes, on the contrary, the superiority of the temptations, to which Heaven exposes us, over those to which they were exposed. Be it so ; but after you have proved that they did not resist any temptation which we would not have resisted had we been in their situation ; I will prove that we are not exposed to any such violent temptations over which they have not obtained the same victories which are required of us. What are the violent temptations with which you are captivated, and the violence of which you are accustomed to allege, in order to excuse your frequent falls ?

Are they temptations of poverty ?—How difficult is it, when we want means to supply the pressing calls of nature not to be exercised with anxiety ? How difficult is it, when we expect to perish with hunger to believe ourselves the favourites of that Providence which *feeds the fowls of heaven, and clothes the lillies of the field*, Matt. vi. 26, 28. And

when we are stripped of every comfort, an ordinary consequence of poverty, to find in communion with God a compensation for the friends of whom we may be deprived. The saints, magnified as models by St. Paul, have vanquished this temptation. See Job, that holy man, and once the richest man of all the East, possessing seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and servants without number :—see him stripped of all his wealth, and saying in that deplorable situation, *Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?* Job. ii. 10. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,* Job. i. 21. See David wandering from wilderness to wilderness; *when my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up,* Ps. xxvii. 10.

Are they temptations of prosperity?—The temptations of prosperity are incomparably more dangerous than those of adversity: at least, the objects of adversity remind us of our indigence and inability; and removing the means of gratification, the passions become either subdued or mortified. But prosperity presents us with a flattering portrait of ourselves; it prompts us to aspire at independence, and strengthens all our corrupt propensities by the facility of gratification. The saints, proposed as models by the Holy Spirit, have vanquished those temptations. See Abraham surrounded with riches; behold him ever mindful of that divine injunction, *Walk before me, and be thou perfect,* Gen. xvii. 1. See Job,—see him ever employing his wealth for him from whom he received it! See him preventing the abuse his

children might have made of his opulence, rising early in the morning after their feasts, and offering sacrifice on their account, *it may be* (said he) *my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts*, Job i. 5. See David on the throne; see him making a sacred use of his power. *Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the wicked doers from the city of the Lord*, Ps. ci. 6—8. See him laudably employed in resuming those pleasures retarded by the affairs of state. When he could not be so recollected by day, he was the more devout at night. He contemplated the marvels of his Maker, displayed by the night. Thus he expressed his sentiments, *When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him*, Psalm viii. 3, 4.

Are they temptations arising from the length of the course, which seems to have no end, and which requires the constant exercise of piety?—It is incomparably more easy to make a hasty sacrifice for religion, than to do it daily by degrees. Virtue is animated on great occasions, and collects the whole of its resources and strength; but how few have the resolution to sustain a long career. The saints whom St. Paul adduces as models, have vanquished this temptation. See Moses,—behold him, for forty tedious years in the wilderness, having to war with nature and the elements, with hunger and with thirst,

with his enemies and with his own people; and, what was harder still, having sometimes to contend with God himself, who was frequently on the point of exterminating the Israelites, committed to the care of this afflicted leader. But Moses triumphed over a vast course of difficulties; ever returning to duty, when the force of temptation, for the moment, had induced him to deviate; ever full of affection for that people, and ever employing, in their behalf, the influence he had over the bowels of a compassionate God.

Are they temptations arising from persecution?—Nature shrinks not only at the idea of suffering, but also at the ingenious means which executioners have invented to extort abnegations. The saints, whom St. Paul adduces as models, have vanquished this class of temptations. Look only at the conduct of those noble martyrs, to whom he is desirous of calling the attention of the Hebrews. Look at the tragic but instructive history of that family, mentioned in the seventh chapter of the second book of Maccabees. The barbarous Antiochus, says the historian, seized on a mother and her seven sons, and resolved, by whips and scourges, to force them to eat swine's flesh. The eldest of the seven boldly asserted his readiness to die for his religion. The king, enraged with anger, commanded the iron-pans, and brazen caldrons, to be heated, and him who first spake to be flayed alive; his tongue cut out; the extremities of his limbs to be cut off, in presence of his mother and brethren; and his body to be roasted, while yet alive, in one of the burning pans. O my



God ! what a sight for the persons so tenderly united to this martyr ! But this scene, very far from shaking their constancy, contributed to its support. They animated one another to an heroic death ; affirming that God would sustain their minds, and assuage their anguish. The second of those brothers, the third, the fourth, the fifth, and sixth, sustained the same sufferings, and with the same support, in presence of their mother. What idea do you form of this woman, you timorous mothers, who hear me to-day ? In what language, think you, did she address her sons ? Do you think that nature triumphed over grace ; that, after having offered to God six of her sons, she made efforts to save the seventh, that he might afford her consolation for the loss sustained in the other six ? No, says the historian, she exhorted him to die like a martyr : Antiochus compelled her to present the seventh, that she might prevent his death. But she said, *O my son, have pity upon me, that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee suck three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education. I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and know the Author of thy being. Fear not this tormentor ; but being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death, that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren.*

Perhaps the historian has embellished his heroes ; perhaps he has been more ambitious to astonish than to instruct ; and to flatter the portrait, than to paint the original. The history of our own age confirms the past age : the history of our own tyrants,



substantiates all that is said of the Jewish tyrants: and the constancy of our modern Maccabees, is a sure test of what is said concerning the constancy of the ancient Maccabees. What has been the seed of the reformed church? It is the blood of the reformers, and of the first reformed. What was the rise of this republic? It was the light of faggots kindled to consume it. Inhabitants of these provinces, what were your ancestors? Confessors and martyrs. And you, my dear countrymen, whence are you come? *Out of great tribulation.* What are you? *Brands plucked from the burning.* Fathers, who have seen their children die for religion; children who have seen their fathers die for religion. O that God may forbear hearkening to the voice of so much blood, which cries to Heaven for vengeance on those who shed it! May God, in placing the crown of righteousness on the heads of those who suffered, pardon those who caused their death! May we be, at least, permitted to recount the history of our brethren, who have conquered in the fight; to encourage those who have yet to combat, but who so disgracefully draw back. Ah! generation of confessors and martyrs, would you degrade the nobility of your descent? Your fathers have confessed their religion amid the severest tortures; and would you deny it in these happy provinces, enlightened by the truth? Have they sacrificed their lives for religion, and will you refuse to sacrifice a portion of your riches? Ah, my brethren, *Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience, the race that is set before us.*

IV. I have said that there is, between us and those illustrious saints, proposed as models by the Holy Spirit, *a similarity of motives*. It implies a contradiction, to suppose that they had more powerful motives to animate them in their course, than those we have proposed to you. Yes, it implies a contradiction, that the Abrahams, quitting their country, the land of their nativity, and wandering they knew not where, in obedience to the divine call:—it implies a contradiction, that the Moseses preferred *affliction with the people of God, to the pleasures of sin, which are but for a session*:—it implies a contradiction, that this multitude of martyrs, some of whom were tormented, others were stoned, others were sawn asunder, others were killed by the sword:—it implies a contradiction, that those illustrious saints have beheld, at the close of their course, a more valuable prize than that extended to you. This prize is a blissful immortality. Here the whole advantage is on your side. This prize is placed more distinctly in your sight, than it was in the view of those illustrious characters. I really think it was St. Paul's view at the close of the chapter, in which he enumerates the saints, whose virtues have formed the leading subject of this discourse. *These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better things for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect*. What is implied in their *not having received the promise*? Does it mean that they did not know the doctrine of a future state? St. Paul affirms quite the contrary. What is meant by their *not being made*

*perfect without us ?* Is it as some of the primitive fathers, and as some of our modern divines have thought, that the Old Testament saints were not received into heaven till the ascension of Jesus Christ ? This is contrary to other passages of our Scriptures. But *they received not the promise*, that is to say, with the same clearness as Christians. *They without us were not made perfect* ; the perfect knowledge of immortality and life being the peculiar prerogative of the Christian church. Whatever be the sense of those words of St. Paul, we will shew, that this doctrine of immortality and life is no longer covered with a veil ; as it was previously to the introduction of the gospel ; but it is demonstrated by a multitude of arguments which sound reason, though less improved than that of the ancients, enables us to adduce for conviction ; and they are placed in evidence by Jesus Christ. Let us introduce this Jesus to you ; let us cause you to hear this Jesus animating you by doctrine and example in the course ; *Him that overcometh*, says he, *will I grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne*, Rev. iii. 21.

V. The last article,—happily adapted to silence those who avail themselves of the distinguished virtues of those saints for not accepting them as models ; or, to conclude in a manner more correspondent to our ministry, an article well calculated to support us in the race God has set before all his saints—is, that between us and those who have finished it with joy, there is *a similarity of assistance*. By nature they were like us, incapable of running the race ; and by

the assistance of grace we become capable of running like them. Let us not imagine that we honour the Deity by making a certain sort of absurd complaints concerning our weakness ; let us not ascribe to him what proceeds solely from our corruption : it is incompatible with his perfections to expose a frail creature to the force of temptation, and exhort him to conquer it without affording the aid requisite to obtain the victory. Be not discouraged, Christian champion, at the inequality God has made in the proportion of aids afforded to them, and to thee ; be not discouraged on seeing thyself led by the plain paths of nature, while nature was inverted for them ; while they *threw down the walls of Jericho by the sound of rams'-horns, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of the fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxing valiant in fight, and turning to flight the armies of the aliens.* We might perform all those prodigies, and not obtain salvation. Yes, we might put to flight the armies of the aliens, display invincible valour in the warfare, escape the edge of the sword, quench the violence of the fire, stop the mouths of lions, overturn walls, force a passage through the sea, and yet be numbered with those to whom Christ will say, *I know you not.* And dost thou fear, Christian combatant, dost thou fear to attain salvation without those miraculous aids ? The requisite assistance for thy salvation is promised. *The fountain is open to the whole house of David.* Zech. xiii. 1. *Seek and ye shall find ; ask, and you shall receive ; knock, and it shall be opened. If you, being evil, know how to give*



*good things unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.*

O! if we knew the value of wisdom! If we knew what miracles of virtue can we wrought by a soul actuated by the Holy Spirit! If we knew how to avail ourselves of this promise! Let us, my dear brethren, avail ourselves of it. Let us ask of God those aids, not to flatter our indolence and vice, but to strengthen us in all our conflicts. Let us say, *Lord, teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight*, Ps. cxliv. Seeing so many enemies combine to detach us from his favour, let us thus invite him to our aid. *Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, let them also that hate him, flee before him.* Let us pour into his bosom all those anxieties, which enfeeble the mind. Then he will reply, *My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness.* Then shall all the enemies of our salvation fly, and be confounded before us. Then shall all the difficulties, which discourage us by the way, disappear. Then shall we exclaim in the midst of conflicts, *Blessed be God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ.* Amen. To him be honour and glory for ever. Amen.



# SERMON VI.

*On the Example of the Saints.*



HEBREWS xii. 1.

*Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us ; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

[THE SUBJECT CONCLUDED.]

WE proceed this day, my brethren, to shew you the way which leads to the end proposed in our two preceding discourses. The words we have now read for the third time, place three things before your view,—distinguished duties,—excellent models,—and wise precautions. The distinguished duties are illustrated in the perseverance we pressed in our first discourse. The excellent models are the saints of the highest order, and in particular *the cloud of witnesses with which we are surrounded*. Of these, St. Paul has made an enumeration and eulogium in the chapter preceding that, from which our text is read ; and whose virtues we have traced in our last discourse. But, by what means may we attain an end so noble ? By what means may we discharge duties

so distinguished, and form ourselves on models so excellent? This shall be the inquiry in our present discourse. It is by *laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.*—Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Enter, my brethren, on the consideration of this subject with that sacred diffidence, with which frail creatures should be affected on contemplating the difficulties with which our course is strewed; but enter with all the magnanimity with which an idea of the powerful and promised aids should inspire the mind of a Christian. Be impressed with this thought, and we conjure you to keep it constantly in view during this discourse: that there is no way of running the race like those illustrious characters adduced as models, but by endeavouring to equal them in holiness; and that there is no way of equalling them in holiness, but by adopting the precautions of which they availed themselves to attain perfection. Happy those of you, my brethren, infinitely more happy than the tongue of mortals can express, happy those whom this consideration shall save from that wretched state of indolence into which the greatest part of men are plunged, and whom it shall excite to that vigilance and energy of life, which is the great design of Christianity, and the grand characteristic of a Christian! Amen.

We shall now illustrate the expressions in our text by a few remarks.

The first is, that they are figurative. St. Paul represents our Christian vocation by the idea of those races, so ancient and celebrated among the heathen : and, pursuing the same thought, he represents the precautions used by athletics to obtain the prize, as those which we must use in order to be crowned. The *weights* of flowing robes, such as were once, and such as are still worn by oriental nations, would very much encumber those who ran in the course. Just so, inordinate cares, I would say, cares concerning temporal things, and criminal purposes, exceedingly encumber those who enter on the course of salvation. I not only allude to criminal purposes, (for who can be so ignorant of religion as to deny it,) but also to excessive cares. St. Paul, in my opinion had this double view. He requires us not only to lay sin aside, but every weight ; that is, all those secular affairs unconnected with our profession. In St. Paul's view, these affairs are to the Christian what the flowing robes would have been to the athletics of whom we spake. How instructive is this idea ! How admirably calculated, if seriously considered, to rectify our notions of morality ! I do not wish to make the Christian to become an anchorite. I do not wish to degrade those useful men, whom God seems to have formed to be the soul of society ; and of whom we may say in the political world, as St. Paul has said in the ecclesiastical, *I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians*, Rom. i. 14. *Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches*, 2 Cor. xi. 28.

On the other hand, we often deceive ourselves with regard to what is called in the world—business! Take an example of a man born with all the uprightness of mind compatible with the loss of primitive innocence. While left to the reflections of his own mind in early life, he followed the dictates of reason, and the sentiments of virtue. His mind, undisturbed with the anxieties inseparable from the management of a large fortune, applied almost wholly to the study of truth, and the practice of virtue. But officious friends, a proud and avaricious family, the roots of vanity, and love of exterior grandeur, scarcely ever eradicated, have induced him to push his fortune, and distinguish himself in the world. He aspires to civil employment. The solicitations to which he must descend, the intrigues he must manage, the friends with whom he must temporize to obtain it, suspend his first habits of life. He accomplishes the object of his wishes. The office, with which he is invested, requires application. Distraction becomes an indispensable duty. The corruption of his heart, but slightly extinguished, rekindles by so much dissipation. After having been some time without the study of truths, once his favourite concern, he becomes habituated not to think of them at all. He loses his recollection of them. He is exhausted in the professional duties he has acquired with so much solicitude. He must have a temporary recess from business. The study of truth, and the practice of virtue, should now be resumed. But he must have a little recreation, a little company, a little wine. Meanwhile age approaches, and death is



far advanced. And when is he to enter on the work of salvation? Happy he, my brethren, who seeks no relations in life, but those to which he is called by duty! Happy he, who in retirement, and if you please, in the obscurity of mediocrity, far from grandeur and from courts, makes salvation, comparatively, his sole, his principal concern. Excessive anxieties, and selfish pursuits are weights which retard exceedingly the Christian in his course. *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* This is St. Paul's idea in the words of my text: and it is the first remark requisite for its illustration.

The second turns upon the situation in which the Hebrews were placed, to whom the advice is given. These Hebrews, like ourselves, were Christians. They were called, as we are called, to run the race of virtue, without which no man can obtain the prize promised by the Gospel. In this view, they required the same instructions with ourselves.

But the Christians, to whom this epistle was addressed, lived, as was observed in our first discourse, in an age of persecution. They were daily on the eve of martyrdom. For that the apostle prepares them throughout the whole of this epistle. To that he especially disposes them in the words which immediately follow those I have discussed. *Consider diligently*, says he, adducing *the author and finisher of our faith*, who so nobly ran the career of martyrdom; *consider diligently him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in*



*your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin,* Heb. xii. 3, 4. What does he mean by their not having yet resisted unto blood? Here is still a reference to the games of the heathen: not indeed to the pleasures of the course as in the words of my text, but to the Olympian games, in which the wrestlers sometimes received a mortal blow. And this idea necessarily includes that of martyrdom. But the flesh, so circumstanced, is very evasive. What excuses will it not make rather than acquiesce in the proposition! Must *I* die for religion? Must *I* be stretched on the rack? Must *I* be hung in chains on a gibbet? Must *I* mount a pile of faggots? St. Paul has therefore doubled the idea in my text. He was desirous to strengthen the Hebrews with a two-fold class of arguments: viz. those required against the temptations common to all Christians; and those peculiar to the afflictive circumstances in which they were placed by Providence. It was proper to press this double idea. This is our second remark for the illustration of the text.

The third turns on the progress the Hebrews had already made in the Christian religion. The nature of this progress determines farther the very character of the advice required, and the precise meaning of those expressions, *Laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.* We never give to a man, who has already made a proficiency in an art or science, the instructions we would give to a pupil. We never warn a mariner, who has traversed the seas for many years, not to strike against a rock which lifts its summit to the clouds, and is perceived

by all who have eyes. We never caution a soldier, blanch'd in the service, not to be surpris'd by the manœuvres of an enemy, which might deceive those who are entering on the first campaign. There were men among the Hebrews to whom the apostle wrote, who, according to his own remark, had need to be taught again *the principles of the doctrine of Christ*; that is, the first elements of Christianity. We find many among the catechumens, who, according to an expression he uses, had need of milk, and were unable to digest strong meat, Heb. v. 12. But we ought not to conceive the same idea of all the Hebrews. The progress many of them had made in religion, superseded, with regard to them, the instructions we might give to those entering on the course. I cannot think, that those Hebrews, who in former days had been enlightened;—those Hebrews, who had *endured a great fight of afflictions*;—those Hebrews, who, according to the force of the Greek term, used in the tenth chapter of this epistle, *had been exposed on the theatre of the world, by affliction, and by becoming a gazing-stock*;—those Hebrews, *who had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods*, Heb. xi. 33, 34;—I cannot think that they had need of precautions against the gross temptations, by which Satan seduces those who have only an external acquaintance with Christianity. The principal design of the apostle in the words of my text, is to fortify them against those subtle snares, and plausible pretences, which sometimes induced Christians to relapse, who seem'd the most established. These are the kind of snares, these are the kind of sophisms the apostle ap-

parently had in view, when he speaks of *weights, and the sin that doth so easily beset us*.

Thanks be to God, my dear brethren, that though we are right, on the one hand, in saying of some among you, that *they have need to be taught again the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat*, Heb. v. 12.—Thanks be to God that you afford us, on the other hand, the consolation granted to our apostle, of seeing among you, cultivated minds, geniuses conversant with the sublime mysteries of Christianity, and with the severest maxims of morality. Hence I should deem it an insult to your discernment and knowledge, if, in the instructions I may give to day, whether for the period of persecution, or for the ordinary conduct of life, I should enlarge on those truths which belong to young converts. What! in a church cherished by God in so dear a manner: what! in a church which enjoys a ministry like yours, is it necessary to affirm, that people are unworthy of the Christian name, when during the period of persecution, they anticipate, if I may so speak, every wish of the persecutors, when they carry in their bosom formularies which abjure their religion; when they attend all the services of superstition; when they enjoy, in consequence of their apostacy, not only their own property, but the property of those *who have gone with Jesus Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach*? What! in a church like this, would it be requisite to preach, that men are unworthy of the Christian name, who in the time of ecclesiastical repose, deliberately live

in habits of fornication or adultery ; who in the face of heaven and earth entice their neighbour's wife, who wallow in wickedness, who are ever disposed either to give or to receive *the wages of unrighteousness* ? Oh ! my very dear brethren, these are not plausible pretences ; these are not subtle snares ; they are the sensible sophisms, the broad snares which deceive those only who are resolved to be deceived. There are, however, subtle snares, which deceive the most established Christians. To these the apostle has immediate reference when he exhorts us to *lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us*. On this shall turn chiefly the explication we shall give of the terms. What are those peculiar kinds of temptations ? What are the precautions we must take to resist them ?—These are the two leading subjects of this discourse ; to these subjects I will venture to solicit the continuation of the attention with which you have deigned to favour me.

I. Let us begin with the temptations, to which we are exposed in the time of ecclesiastical tribulation.

1. The devil would sometimes inspire us with sentiments of *unbelief* respecting the truth of the promises God has given the church. It seems a difficult task, to reconcile the magnificence of those promises with the deluge of calamities which have inundated it in periods of persecution. What is this church, according to the prophets ? It is a society, which was to be completely irradiated with the glory of God. It is a society, whose prosperity was to have no end, which should realize this prediction ;



*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath : for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment ; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished, Isa. li. 6.* It is a society, to whom kings should be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers, Isa. xlix. 23. It is a society, whose prosperity made the prophets exclaim, *Break forth into joy ; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem : for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God, Isa. lii. 9, 10.* To say all in one word, it is a society built upon the rock, and of which Jesus Christ hath said *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, Matt. xvi. 18.* What is the conformity between these promises and the event! or if you please, what likeness is there between the portrait and the original! Does not hell prevail against the church, when her enemies exile her pastors, scatter her flock, suppress her worship, and burn her sanctuaries? Do all nations see the salvation of God, the arm of the Lord made bare, to effectuate distinguished events in behalf of this society; when they are given up to the fury of their tyrants; when Pilate and Herod are confederated to destroy them; when they obtain over them daily new victories? Do the waste places of Jerusalem sing, when the ways of Zion mourn, *when her priests sigh and when her virgins are afflicted?* Does her salvation remain for ever, when the church has scarcely breathed in one place, before she is agi-



tated in another; when she has scarcely survived one calamity before she is overtaken with another; when the beast causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, bond and free, to receive his mark in their hand, or in their forehead? Rev. xiii. 16. Are kings nursing fathers to the church, and queens nursing mothers, when they snatch the children from her breasts; when they populate the desarts with fugitives; and cause the dead bodies of her witnesses to lie in the streets of the great city, which is called Sodom and Egypt? Rev. xi. 8.

It is against this first device of satan, St. Paul would fortify the Hebrews in the words of my text. Hear his admonitions and instructions; *ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children; my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he, whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons,* Heb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8.

I have no need to arm you with any other shield against the sentiments of unbelief, with which some of you are assailed on viewing the calamities of the church. Ecclesiastical persecutions are paternal chastisements, which God inflicts upon her members. I would ask our brethren, who complain of the length of the persecution, and are ever saying, *Alas! what always in exile, always in the gallies?* I would ask them, as they seem astonished, and are bold

enough to complain of their duration, whether they have profited by these afflictions? God, in chastising his church, is desirous of correcting the abuse you have made of prosperity. Have you profited by this chastisement? Have you learned to make a right use of prosperity? God, in chastising the church, is desirous to correct the indifference you have entertained for public worship. Have you profited by this chastisement? Have you learned to sacrifice your dearest interests to attend his worship? And if you have made those sacrifices, have you learned to worship with affections correspondent to the sacrifices you have made for him? God, in chastising the church, is desirous to correct the strong attachment you have conceived for this world. Have you profited by the chastisement? Called to choose between riches and salvation, have you ever preferred the salvation of your souls, to exterior happiness?

2. In the time of tribulation, the devil strongly prompts us to presumption. Here the commands of Jesus Christ are explicit, *When they persecute you in one city, flee to another*, Matt. x. 23. The decision of wisdom is extremely positive; *they who love the danger, shall perish by it*, Matt. xxxvi. 52. Experience is a convincing test. St. Peter presumed to go into the court of Caiaphas, under a pretence of following Jesus, and there he denied him. Is not this what we have represented a thousand and a thousand times, to those of our unhappy brethren, whom this part of our discourse particularly respects? We have proved, that we must either leave the places in which the truth is persecuted, or calm-

ly submit to martyrdom. We have made it appear that no man can assure himself of constancy to suffer martyrdom, unsupported by the extraordinary aids of the Holy Spirit. We have demonstrated, that it is presumption to promise themselves those aids, while they neglect the means offered by Providence to avoid the danger. They do violence to reason. They resist demonstration. They presume on their own strength. They rely wholly on supernatural power. They promise themselves a chimerical conquest. Hence those frequent abnegations. Hence those awful falls. Hence those scandalous apostacies. I have therefore done wrong in placing the temptations of presumption among those subtle snares, those plausible pretences, which impose on the most established Christians. I am mistaken; they are the broadest snares, and grossest sophisms of the enemy of our salvation; and he is weak indeed who suffers himself to be surprised. What! have you proved your weakness a hundred and a hundred times, and do you still talk of power? What! have you at this day scarcely resolution to sacrifice a part of your property for religion, and do you presume that you can sacrifice your life? What! have you no fortitude to follow Jesus Christ into peaceful countries, and do you presume to hope that you can follow him to the cross?

3. Those, whom satan cannot destroy by presumption, he endeavours, and it is a third snare with which he assails the church in tribulation; he endeavours, I say, to destroy by *discouragement*. "I am weak," says a man who discourages himself by

temptations of this nature ; “ I am weak : I shall not have constancy to sustain the miseries inseparably attendant on those who devote themselves to voluntary exile, by going into places where the truth is professed ; nor fortitude to endure the tortures inflicted on those who avow it in places where it is persecuted. I am weak : I have not courage to lead a languishing life in unknown nations, to beg my bread with my children, and to hear my poverty sometimes reproached by those to whom the cause for which I suffer ought to render it venerable. I am weak : I shall never have constancy to endure the stink of dungeons, the weight of the oar, and all the terrific apparatus of martyrdom.”

You say, I am weak ! say rather I am wicked, and pronounce upon yourselves beforehand the sentence which the gospel has pronounced against persons of this description. You are weak ! But is it not to the weak that are made, (provided their intentions are really sincere,) the promises of those strong consolations, which enable them to say, *When I am weak, then I am strong*, 2 Cor. vii. 10. You are weak ! But is it not said to the weak, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*, 1 Cor. x. 13. You are weak ! But is it not the weak to whom God has realised the truth of his magnificent promises ? I will not refer you to those marvellous ages, when men, women, and children sustained the most terrific tortures with a courage more than human. I will not adduce here the example of those saints,



enumerated in the chapter preceding my text ; of saints who were stoned, who were killed with the sword, who were tortured, who were fettered, and who displayed more constancy in suffering, than their persecutors and hangmen, in the infliction of torments. But go to those myriads of exiles, who have inundated England, Germany, and these provinces, all of whom are protestant nations ; those myriads of exiles, *who have gone to Jesus Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach* ; destitute of every earthly comfort, but delighted to have gotten their souls for a prey ; were not they by nature weak as you ? And, with the assistance of grace, may not you, become strong as they ? But those fathers, but those mothers, who have torn themselves away from their children, and the separation of whom from creatures so dear, seemed as tearing away their own flesh, were they not by nature weak as you ? But those Abrahams, who, taking their children by the hand, went, in some sort, to sacrifice them to hunger and thirst, to cold and rain ; and who replied to the piercing complaints of those innocent victims, *The Lord will provide, my children ; in the mountain of the Lord it shall be seen*, Gen. xxii. 8. 14. But those fathers, those mothers, were they not naturally weak as you ? And with the help of God, may not you become as strong as they ? You are weak ! But those slaves who have now been thirty years on board the gallies ; those *Rois*, those *Broussons*, those *Marolles*, and such a multitude of our martyrs, who have sealed the evangelical doctrine with their blood, who have ascended the scaffold, not only with resignation, but



with joy, with transport, with songs of triumph, exclaiming, amid their sufferings, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*, Phil. iv. 13. *Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ*, 2 Cor. ii. 14. *Blessed be the Lord, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight*, Psalm cxliv. 1. Were not those venerable men naturally weak as you? And with the help of God, may not you become strong as they? Are you weak! It is still added, say rather, I am wicked, and blush for your impiety.

4. These are the most plausible insinuations, and the subtlest snares; and consequently, the most likely to entangle those who are defective in precautions of defence. But the enemy of our salvation sometimes borrows weapons from conscience, in order to give it mortal wounds. The advice we give to the persecuted, is that of Jesus Christ; *If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross, and follow me*, Matt. xvi. 21. *Come out of Babylon, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues*, Rev. xviii. 4. To this duty, they oppose other duties; and family duties in particular. What would become of my father, should I leave him in his old age? What would become of my children if I should forsake them in their infancy? They allege the duties of benevolence. What would become of so many poor people who procure bread in my employment? So many starving families, who subsist on my alms? So many people in perplexity, who are guided by my advice? What would become of these, if neglecting their happiness, I should sole-

ly seek my own? They allege the duties of zeal. What would become of religion in this place, in which it was once so flourishing, if all those who know the truth should obey the command, *Come out of Babylon.*

Let us, my brethren, unmask this snare of the devil. He places these last duties before your eyes, in order that you may neglect the first, without which all others are detestable in the sight of God our sovereign Judge; who, whenever he places us in a situation in which we cannot practise a virtue without committing a crime, prohibits that virtue. God assumes to himself the government of the world, and he will not lay it on your shoulders: he still asserts the same language he once addressed to Saul, when that prince, under a pretence of obedience to a precept, had violated an explicit prohibition. *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams,* 1 Sam. xv. 22.

5. But is it public worship; (and this is a fifth snare, a fifth insinuation; and a fifth class of those *sins which so easily beset us*;)—is it public worship which constitutes the essence of religion? Does not true devotion wholly consist in worshipping in Spirit, and in truth? May we not retain religion secretly in our heart, though we apparently suspend the exterior service. And though external worship be required, must it always be presented in the presence of a multitude? May not private devotion be a substitute for public worship? And may we not

offer to God in the closet, the devotion which the calamity of the time does not allow us to offer in temples consecrated to his glory, and perform in our families the offices of piety which tyrants prevent our performing in numerous assemblies?

(1.) I answer; what are the private devotions performed in places in which the truth is persecuted! Ridiculous devotions; many of those who perform them being divided between Christ and Belial, between true and idolatrous adoration. In the morning, before the altar of false gods; in the evening, before the altar of the supreme Jehovah. In the morning, denying Jesus Christ in public; in the evening, confessing him in private. In the morning, making a parade of error; in the evening, pretending to acknowledge the truth. Devotions in which they are in continual alarms; in which they are obliged to conceal themselves from their enemies, from many of their friends, and to say in secret, who sees me? who hears me? who suspects me? Devotions in which they are afraid of false brethren, afraid of the walls, or afraid of themselves!

(2.) The inward disposition, you say, constitutes the essence of religion. I ask, what sort of inward disposition is that of the Christians whom we attack? Shew us now, this religion which consists wholly of inward dispositions; this worship in spirit and in truth. What! this gross ignorance a necessary consequence of privation of the ministry, those absurd notions of our mysteries, those vague ideas of morality; is this the inward religion, is this *the worship in spirit and in truth*? What! this abhorrence they

entertain of the communion of the persecutor, who they know scarcely possesses the first principles of the persecuted? Is this the inward religion, is this the *worship in spirit and in truth*? What! this kind of deism, and deism certainly of the worst kind which we see maintained by the persons in question? Is this the inward religion, is this *the worship in spirit and in truth*? What! this tranquillity with which they enjoy not only the riches they have preserved at the expence of their soul; but the riches of those who have sacrificed the whole of their property for the sake of the gospel? Is this the inward religion, is this *the worship in spirit and in truth*? What! this participation in the pleasures of the age, at a period when they ought to weep: those frantic joys, if I may so speak, over the ruins of our temples, after renouncing the doctrines there professed? Is this the inward religion, is this *the worship in spirit and in truth*? What! those marriages they contract, in which it is stipulated, in case of issue, they shall be baptized by the ministers of error, and educated in their religion? Is this the inward religion, is this *the worship in spirit and in truth*?

6. I will add but one illusion more, and that is the illusion of *security*. If we offend, say the persons we attack;—if we offend in submitting to the pressure of the times, we do it through weakness, and weakness is an object of divine clemency. It is not possible, that a merciful God, a God who *knows whereof we are made*, a God who has formed us with the attachment we have for our property, our relatives, and our lives; it is not possible, that this

God should condemn us to eternal misery, because we have not had the fortitude to sacrifice the whole. A double shield, my brethren, shall cover you against this temptation, if you have prudence to use it; a double reflection shall defend you against this last illusion.

First, the positive declarations of our Scriptures. God is merciful, it is true; but he is arbitrator of the terms on which his mercy is offered: or, as it is written, he extends mercy to whom he pleases; and God who extends mercy to whom he pleases, declares that he will shew no mercy to those who refuse to honour his truth. He declares, that *he will deny those before his Father, who deny him before men*, Matt. x. 33. He declares, that *he who loveth father or mother more than him, is not worthy of him*, Matt. x. 37. He declares, that *they who receive the mark of the beast, or worship his image, shall be cast alive into the lake of fire, burning with brimstone*, Rev. xix. 20. He declares, that he will class in the great day, *the fearful*; that is, those who have not had courage to confess their religion, with *the unbelieving*, with *the abominable*, with *the murderers*, with *the whoremongers*, with *the sorcerers*, with *the idolaters*, with *the liars*. He declares, that *the fearful, shall*, in common with the others, *be cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*, Rev. xxi. 8.

The second reflection, which should be a shield for repelling this illusion of the devil, arises from the nature of the crime itself, accounted a mere infirmity. Four characters contribute to the atrocity of a



crime. 1. When it is not committed in a moment of surprize, and when we are taken unawares. 2. When we persist in it not only for a few hours, or days; but live in it for whole years. 3. When, during those years of criminality, we have all the opportunities we could ask of emancipation. 4. When this crime not only captivates the solitary offender, but draws a great number more into the same perdition. These four characters all associate with the crime in question, the crime reckoned a weakness, and obstinately classed among the infirmities of nature. But I have not resolution to enlarge upon this subject, and to prove, that our unhappy brethren are in such imminent danger of destruction. And the expiration of my time is a subordinate inducement to proceed to other subjects.

II. Were it possible for the discourses introduced into this pulpit to be finished pieces, in which we were allowed to exhaust the subjects: were you capable of paying the same attention to exercises, which turn on spiritual subjects, you bestow on business or pleasure, I would present you with a new scheme of arguments; I would reduce, to different classes, the temptations which Satan employs to obstruct you in the course. But we should never promise ourselves the completion of a subject, in the short time to which we are prescribed.

I shall take a shorter course, harmonizing the extent and importance of the remaining subject, with the brevity of my time. I shall proceed to give a portrait of the life, common to persons who attain the utmost age God has assigned to man. I shall

conduct him from infancy to the close of life, tracing to you, in each period it is presumed he shall pass, the various temptations which assail him; and by which it is impossible he should fall, if he keep in view the apostle's exhortation, *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.* Let every one who hears this sermon, with a view to profit, carefully apply to himself those traits, which have the nearest resemblance to his state. Hence, I would presume, every one of you to be the man, who shall attain the age of eighty years: these are the temptations he will find in his course.

1. Scarcely will you be liberated from the arms of the nurse, when you will fall under the care of weak and indulgent people; who will, through a cruel complaisance, take as much pains to cherish the corrupt propensities of nature, as they ought to take for their subjugation. At this early period they will sow, in your heart, awful seeds, which will produce an increase of thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold. They will make a jest of your faults, they will applaud your vices, and so avail themselves of your tender age, to give a thousand and a thousand wounds to your innocence, that all your application will scarcely heal, when you shall be capable of application. If you do not avail yourselves of the first sentiments of piety and reason, to resist, so far as the weakness of childhood will permit, those dangerous snares, you will find yourselves very far advanced in the road of vice, before your situation is perceived.

2. Is infancy succeeded by youth? Fresh snares, new temptations, occur. On the commencement of

reflection, you will discover existing, in your constitution and temperature, principles grossly opposed to the law of God. Perhaps the evil may have its principal seat in the soul, perhaps in the body. In the temperature of the soul, you will find principles of envy, principles of vanity, or principles of avarice. In the temperature of the body, you will find principles of anger, principles of impurity, or principles of indolence. If you are not aware of this class of temptations, you will readily suffer yourselves to be carried away by your propensity, and you will obey it without remorse, you will invest it with privilege to do with innocence, what the rest of the world cannot do without a crime. You must expect to find in your temperature, principles which will dispense with virtue; and to be captivated by maxims, which too much predominate in the world; and which you will daily hear from the mouths of your companions in dissipation. These maxims are, that youth is the age of pleasure; that it is unbecoming a young man to be grave, serious, devout, and scrupulous; that now we ought to excuse not only games, pleasure, and the theatres, but even debauchery, drunkenness, luxury, and profaneness; that swearing gives a young man an air of chivalry becoming his age, and debauchery an air of gallantry, which does him credit in the world. Caution yourselves against this class of temptations; lay aside the sin which so easily besets you, if you should relax in one single instance. Ah! think, my son, that you may never survive those years you devote to the world: think that the small-pox, a fever, a single quarrel, or one

act of debauchery, may snatch away your life. Think, though you should run your course, you will never have such flexible organs, so retentive a memory, so ready a conception, as you have to-day ; and consequently, you will never have such a facility for forming habits of holiness. Think how you will one day lament to have lost so precious an opportunity. Consecrate your early life to duty, dispose your heart, at this period, to ensure salvation. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. Eccles. xii. 1.*

3. After having considered the period of youth, we proceed to maturer age. A new stage, fresh snares, more temptations. What profession can you choose, which the spirit of the world has not infected with its venom ; and which has not, so to speak, its peculiar morality ?

The peculiar morality of a *soldier*, whose duty is to defend society, to maintain religion, to repress licentiousness, to oppose rapine by force ; and to deduce, from so many dangers, which open the way of death, motives to render the account which Heaven will require : but it is a profession in which a man thinks himself authorized to insult society, to despise religion, to foment licentiousness, to raise his arm to sacrifice life ; to sell his person for the most ambitious designs, the most iniquitous conquests, and sanguinary enterprizes of sovereigns.

The peculiar morality of the *statesman* and *magistrate*, whose profession is to preserve the oppressed, to weigh with calmness a long detail of causes and consequences, to avail himself of the dignity to



which he is elevated, to afford examples of virtue : but it is a profession in which he thinks himself entitled to become inaccessible to the injured, to weary them out with mortifying reserves, with insupportable delays, and to dispense with labour and application, abandoning himself to dissipation and vice.

The peculiar morality of the *lawyer*, whose duty is to restrict his ministry to truth and justice, never to plead for a cause which has not the appearance of equity, and to be the advocate of those who are inadequate to reward his services : but it is a profession in which a man thinks himself authorized to maintain both falsehood and truth, to support iniquity and falsehood, and to direct his efforts to the celebrity he may acquire, or the remuneration he may receive.

The peculiar morality of the *merchant*, whose duty is to detest short weights and false measures, to pay the revenue, and to be satisfied with a moderate profit : but a profession in which he thinks himself authorized to indulge those very vices, he ought in particular to avoid.

The peculiar morality of the *minister*. What is the vocation of a minister ? Is it not to devote himself entirely to virtue ? Is it not to set a pattern to all the church ? Is it not to visit the hospitals, and houses of affliction, and to alleviate, as far as he can, the pressure of their calamities ? Is it not to direct his studies, not to subjects by which he may acquire celebrity for learning and eloquence, but to those which may render him most useful ? Is it not to determine on the choice of a text, not by the caprice



of the people, which on this point is often weak, and mostly partial, but by the immediate wants of the flock? Is it not to pay the same attention to a poor man's dying child, stretched on a couch of grass, and unknown to the rest of the world, as to his, who possesses a distinguished name, who abounds in wealth, who provides the most splendid coffin and magnificent funeral? Is it not to *cry aloud, to lift up his voice like a trumpet, to shew the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins; to know no man after the flesh; and when he ascends this pulpit, to reprove vice with firmness, however exalted may be the situation of the offender? But what is the morality of a pastor? Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord; for we cannot answer thee one of a thousand.* Caution yourselves against this class of temptations. The world is neither your legislator, nor your judge: Jesus Christ, and not the world, is the sovereign arbitrator. It is the morality of Jesus Christ, and not the maxims of men, which you should follow.

4. Having reviewed human life in infancy, youth, and manhood, I proceed to consider it in *old age*; in that old age which seems so distant, but which is, in fact, within a few years; in that old age which seems, in some sort, at the distance of eternity, but which advances with astonishing rapidity. A new stage, fresh snares, more temptations occur: infirmities, troubles, and cares, arrive with age. The less there remains on earth to defend, the more men are resolved not to let it go. The love of life having predominated for fifty or sixty years, sometimes unites

and attaches itself, so to speak, yet more closely to the short period, which they think is still promised. It is so rooted and entrenched in the heart, as to be immoveable by all our sermons on eternity. They look on all who witness the calamities they suffer, as though they were the cause: it seems as though they were reproached for having lived so long, and they make them atone for this imaginary fault, as though they were really guilty. The thoughts of death they put away with the greater care, as it approaches nearer, it being impossible to avoid the idea, without these efforts to remove it. They call to their aid amusements, which would scarcely be excusable in the age of infancy: thus they lose the precious remains of life,—granted by the long-suffering of God,—as they have lost the long course of years, of which nothing now remains but the recollection.

Be on your guard, aged men, against this class of temptations, and against this class of snares, which will easily beset you, unless the whole of your strength be collected for precaution and defence. Let prayer be joined to vigilance: let those trembling hands, weakened with the weight of years, be raised to heaven: let that voice, scarcely capable of articulating accents, be addressed to God: entreat him, who succoured you in the weakness of infancy, in the vigour of youth, in the bustle of riper age, still to sustain you, when the hand of time is heavy upon your head.

Hitherto, my dear brethren, I have addressed you, merely concerning the dangers peculiar to each age. What would you not say now, if we should enter

into a detail of those which occur in every situation of life? We find, in every age, the temptations of adversity, the temptations of prosperity, the temptations of health, the temptations of sickness, the temptations of company, and the temptations of solitude: and who is able fully to enumerate all the sins which so easily beset us in the various ages of life? How to be rich without pride, and poor without complaint? How to fill the middle rank of fortune, without the disgust naturally consequent on a station, which has nothing emulous and animating; which can be endured by those only, who discover the evils from which they are sheltered, and the dangers from which they are freed? How to enjoy health without indulging in the dissipations of life, without immersion into its cares, or indulging in its pleasures? How to be sick, without admitting complaint against that gracious Providence, which distributes both good and evil? How to be in solitude, without being captivated with reveries and corrupt propensities? How to be in company, without receiving the poison which is there respired, without receiving a conformity to every surrounding object? How to see one's self obscure in the world, and unknown to our fellow-creatures, without indulging that anxiety, which is less exercised in the world for the love of virtue, than to avoid the odium consequent on an open violation of its laws? How to enjoy reputation without ostentation, and blending some grains of incense with what we have received of others? Every where snares, every where dangers beset us.

From the truths we have delivered, there necessarily arises an objection, by which you are struck, and many of you already discouraged. What! are we always to be thinking about religion, being in constant danger of losing it, should we suffer it to escape our minds? What! must we always watch, always pray, always fight? Yes, my brethren, always, at all times. On seeing the temptations of youth, you should guard against those of riper age. On seeing the temptations of solitude, you should guard against those of company. On seeing the temptations of adversity, you should guard against those of prosperity. On seeing the temptations of health, you should guard against those of sickness. And on seeing the temptations of sickness, you should guard against those of death. Yes: always watching, always fighting, always praying.

I do not say, if you should happen to relax a moment from the work, I do not say, if you should happen to fall by some of the temptations to which you are exposed from the world, that you are lost without resource, that you instantly go from sin to punishment, from the abuse of time to an unhappy eternity. Perhaps God will grant you a day, or a year for repentance; but perhaps he will not. Perhaps you may repent; but perhaps you may not. Perhaps you may be saved, but perhaps not. Perhaps hell—perhaps heaven. What repose can you enjoy in so awful an alternative? What delight can you enjoy in certain vices, the perpetration of which requires time? What repose can you enjoy in a criminal intrigue, saying to yourself, perhaps God will pardon me after

having brought this intrigue to an issue : but perhaps also during the course of the crime, he will pronounce the sentence it deserves. What repose can you enjoy in the night preceding a day destined to a complication of crimes, saying to yourself, perhaps I shall see the day devoted to so dreadful a purpose : but perhaps this very night *my soul shall be required*. What delight can you take in a tour of pleasure, when it actually engrosses the time you had devoted to search your conscience, to examine your state, to prepare for death, to make restitution for so many frauds, so many extortions, so many dissipations ? What satisfaction can you take, saying to yourself, perhaps I shall see the day devoted to so great a work, but perhaps it will never come ?

Ah ! my brethren, have you any idea of the shortness of life ; have you any idea of the eternity which follows, when you start the objection, What ! always pray, always fight, always watch ? This life, the whole of which we exhort you to devote to your salvation ; this life, of which you say, always—always ; this is the life, on the shortness of which you make so many exaggerated declamations : I mistake, the shortness of which can scarcely be exaggerated. This life, of which you say, when we exhort you to devote it entirely to your salvation ; this life of which you say, What ! always—always ; this life, which is but a vapour dissipated in the air : this life, which passes with the swiftness of a weaver's shuttle ; this life, which like a flower blooms in the morning, and withers at night : this life, which like a dream amuses the fancy for a night, and of which not a vestige



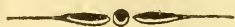
remains at the dawn of day :—this is the life which is but like a thought. And eternity, concerning which you regret to be always employed ; that abyss, that gulf, are those mountainous heaps of years, of ages, of millions and oceans of ages, of which language the most expressive, images the most sublime, geniuses the most acute, orators the most eloquent, I had almost said, the most audacious, can give you but imperfect notions.

Ah ! life of fourscore years ! A long duration in the estimation of the flesh, when employed in wrestling against the flesh ; but a short period when compared with eternity. Ah ! life of fourscore years, spent wholly in watchfulness, prayer, and warfare ; but thou art well spent when we obtain the prize of a blissful immortality ! My brethren, my dear brethren, who can live but fourscore years,—What do I say ? Who among us can expect to see the age of fourscore years ? Christians, who are already arrived at thirty, others at forty, others at fifty, and another already at fourscore years. My dear brethren, some of you must die in thirty, some of you in twenty, some of you in ten years, and some in a single day. My dear brethren, let us consecrate to eternity the remnant of our days of vanity. Let us return to the testimonies of the Lord, if we have had the misfortune to deviate. Let us enter on the race of salvation, if we have had the presumption to defer our entrance into it to the present period. Let us run with patience the race, if we have already made a progress ; and let the thought, the attracting, ravishing thought of the

prize, which terminates the race, dispel, from our mind, every idea of the difficulties which obstruct the way. Amen! May God give us grace so to do. To whom be honour and glory, dominion, and magnificence, now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON VII.

*Saint Paul's Discourse before Felix and Drusilla.*



ACTS XXIV. 24, 25.

*And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered : Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

**MY** brethren, though the kingdom of the righteous be not of this world, they present however, amid their meanness, marks of dignity and power. They resemble Jesus Christ. He humbled himself so far as to take the form of a servant, but frequently exercised the rights of a sovereign. From the abyss of humiliation to which he condescended, emanations of the Godhead were seen to proceed. Lord of nature, he commanded the winds and seas. He bade the storms and tempests subside. He restored health to the sick, and life to the dead. He imposed silence on the Rabbins : he embarrassed Pilate on the throne ; and disposed of paradise, at the moment he himself was pierced with the nails, and fixed on the cross. Behold the portrait of believers ! *They are dead.*

*Their life is hid with Christ in God, Col. iii. 3. If they had hope only in this life, they were of all men most miserable, 1 Cor. xv. 19.* Nevertheless, they discover I know not what superiority of birth. Their glory is not so concealed, but we sometimes perceive its lustre ; just as the children of a king, when unknown and in a distant province, betray in their conversation and carriage indications of illustrious descent.

We might illustrate this truth by numerous instances. Let us attend to that in our text. There we shall discover that association of humility and grandeur, of reproach and glory, which constitutes the condition of the faithful while on earth. Behold St. Paul, a Christian, an apostle, a saint. See him brought from tribunal to tribunal, from province to province ; sometimes before the Romans, sometimes before the Jews, sometimes before the high priest of the synagogue, and sometimes before the procurator of Cæsar. See him conducted from Jerusalem to Cesarea, and summoned to appear before Felix. In all these traits, do you not recognize the Christian walking in the narrow way, the way of tribulation, marked by his Master's feet ? But consider him nearer still. Examine his discourse, look at his countenance ; there you will see a fortitude, a courage, and a dignity, which constrains you to acknowledge that there was something really grand in the person of St. Paul. He preached Jesus Christ, at the very moment he was persecuted, for having preached him. He preached, even when in chains. He did more : he attacked his judge on the throne.

He reasoned, he enforced, he thundered. He seemed already to exercise the function of judging the world, which God has reserved for the saints. He made Felix tremble. Felix felt his heart captivated by superior power. Unable to hear St. Paul any longer without appalling fears, he sent him away. *After certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ, &c..*

We find here three considerations which claim attention.

I. An enlightened preacher, who discovers due discernment in the selection of his subjects.

II. A conscience appalled, and confounded on the recollection of its crimes, and of that awful judgment where they must be weighed.

III. We find, in fact, a sinner alarmed, but not converted; a sinner who desires to be saved, but delays his conversion: a case, alas! but of too common occurrence.

You perceive already, my brethren, the subject of this discourse; that St. Paul reasoned before Felix and Drusilla, of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come; that Felix trembled; and that he sent the apostle away: three considerations which shall divide this discourse. May it produce on your hearts, on the hearts of Christians, the same effects St. Paul produced on the soul of this heathen; but may it have a happier influence on your lives. Amen!

I. Paul preached before Felix and Drusilla, *on righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.*



This is the first object of discussion. Before, however, we proceed further with our remarks, we must first sketch the character of this Felix, and this Drusilla, which will serve as a basis to the first proposition.

After the sceptre was departed from Judah, and the Jewish nation subjugated by Pompey, the Roman emperors governed the country by procurators. Claudius filled the imperial throne while St. Paul was at Cesarea. This Emperor had received a servile education from his grandmother Lucia, and from his mother Antonia; and, having been brought up in obsequious meanness, evinced, on his elevation to the empire, marks of the inadequate care which had been bestowed on his infancy. He had neither courage, nor dignity of mind. He who was raised to sway the Roman sceptre, and consequently to govern the civilized world, abandoned his judgment to his freed men, and gave them a complete ascendancy over his mind. Felix was one of those freed men. "He exercised," and these are the words of a Roman historian, (Tacitus,) "He exercised in Judea, the imperial functions with a mercenary soul." We have a proof of his avarice immediately after our text, where it is said, he sent for Paul,—not to hear him concerning the truth of the Gospel which this apostle preached with so much power;—nor to inquire whether this religion, against which the Jews had raised the standard, was contrary to the interest of the state;—but because he hoped to have received money for his liberation. Here is the effect of his avarice.

Josephus recites an instance of his voluptuousness. It is his marriage with Drusilla. She was a Jewess, as is remarked in our text. King Azizus, her former husband, was a heathen; and in order to gain her affections, he had conformed to the most rigorous ceremonies of Judaism. Felix saw her, and became enamoured of her beauty. He conceived for her a violent passion; and, in defiance of the sacred ties which united her to a husband, he resolved to become master of her person. His addresses were received. Drusilla violated her former engagements, preferring to contract with Felix an illegitimate marriage, to an adherence to the chaste ties which united her to Azizus. Felix the Roman, Felix the procurator of Judea, and the favourite of Cæsar, appeared to her a noble acquisition. It is indeed a truth, we may here observe, that grandeur and fortune are charms which mortals find the greatest difficulty to resist; and against which the purest virtue has need to be armed with all its constancy. Recollect those two characters of Felix, and Drusilla. St. Paul, before those two personages, treated concerning *the faith in Christ*; that is, concerning the Christian religion, of which Jesus Christ is the sum and substance, the author and the end: and from the numerous doctrines of Christianity, he selected *righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*.

Here is, my brethren, an admirable text; but a text selected with discretion. Fully to comprehend it, recollect the character we have given of Felix. He was covetous, luxurious, and governor of Judea.

St. Paul selected three subjects, correspondent to these characteristics. Addressing an avaricious man, he treated of righteousness. Addressing the governor of Judea, one of those persons who think themselves independent, and responsible to none but themselves for their conduct, he treated of *a judgment to come*.

My brethren, when a man preaches for popularity, instead of seeking the glory of Christ, he seeks his own; he selects subjects calculated to display his talents, and flatter his audience. Does he preach before a professed infidel, he will expatiate on morality; and be ashamed to pronounce the venerable words—covenant—satisfaction. Does he address an antinomian audience, who would be offended were he to enforce the practical duties of religion; he makes every thing proceed from election, reprobation, and the irresistibility of grace. Does he preach in the presence of a profligate court, he will enlarge on the liberty of the gospel, and the clemency of God. He has the art,—(a most detestable art, but too well understood in all ages of the church,)—he has the art of uniting his interests and his ministry. A political preacher endeavours to accommodate his preaching to his passions. Minister of Christ, and minister of his own interests, to express myself with this apostle, he *makes a gain of godliness*: on this principle had Felix expressed a desire to understand the gospel, St. Paul had a favourable opportunity of paying his court in a delicate manner. The Christian religion has a gracious aspect towards every class of men. He might have discussed some of

those subjects which would have flattered the governor. He might have discoursed on the dignity of princes, and on the relation they have to the Supreme Being. He might have said, that the magistrate *beareth not the sword in vain*, Rom. xiii. 4. That the Deity himself has said, *ye are gods, and ye are all the children of the Most High*, Psalm lxxxii. 6. But all this adulation, all this finesse, were unknown to our apostle. He sought the passions of Felix in their source; he forced the sinner in his last retreat. He boldly attacked the governor with *the sword of the Spirit*, and with *the hammer of the word*. Before the object of his passion, and the subject of his crime, before Drusilla, he treated of *temperance*. When Felix sent for him to satiate his avarice, he talked of *righteousness*. While the governor was in his highest period of splendor, he discoursed of *a judgment to come*.

Preachers of the court, confessors to princes, pests of the public, who are the chief promoters of the present persecution, and the cause of our calamities! O that I could animate you by the example of St. Paul: and make you blush for your degeneracy and turpitude! My brethren, you know a prince; and would to God we knew him less! But let us respect the lustre of a diadem, let us venerate the Lord's anointed in the person of our enemy. Examine the discourses delivered in his presence; read the sermons pompously entitled, "Sermons preached before the King;" and see those other publications dedicated to—The perpetual conqueror, whose battles were so many victories—terrible in war—ador-



able in peace. You will there find nothing but flattery and applause. Who ever struck, in his presence, at ambition and luxury? Who ever ventured there to maintain the rights of the widow and the orphan? Who, on the contrary, has not magnified the greatest crimes into virtues; and by a species of idolatry before unknown, made Jesus Christ himself subservient to the vanity of a mortal man?

Oh! but St. Paul would have preached in a different manner! Before Felix, before Drusilla, he would have said that, *fornicators shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. In the midst of an idolatrous people, he would have painted in the liveliest colours, innocence oppressed, the faith of edicts violated, the Rhine overflowing with blood, the Palatinate still smoking, and buried in its own ashes. I check myself; we again repeat it: let us respect the sacred grandeur of kings, and let us deplore their grandeur, which exposes them to the dangerous poison of adulation and flattery.

This suggests an important reflection; a reflection concerning the necessity which should induce sovereigns to have ecclesiastics about their persons who would address them with frankness, and prompt them to the recollection of their duty. Grandeur, power, and applause; (we are obliged to make the observations in our pulpits, in places where decorum requires attention: for we are of no consideration in the bustle of a splendid court;) grandeur, power, and applause are charms against which it is very difficult for the human mind to retain its superiority. Amid so many dangers, if a man have no guide but him-



self, no preacher but his conscience; if instead of attending to the sober dictates of truth, he is surrounded with flatterers, how can he resist so many attractions? And, if he do not resist, how can he be saved? For in fact, the same laws are given to the high and the low; to the rich and the poor; to the sovereign and the subject.

In society, there is a gradation of rank. One is king, another is a subject: one tramples a carpet of purple and gold under his feet, another leads a languishing life, begging a precarious pittance of bread: one is drawn in a superb carriage, another wades through the dirt. But before the judgment-seat of Christ, all these distinctions will be no more. There will then be no respect of persons. The same nothing is our origin; the same dust is our end; the same Creator gave us being; the same Saviour accomplished our redemption; and the same tribunal must decide our eternal destiny. How very important is it, when a man is elevated to dignities, inaccessible, so to speak, to reflections of this nature,—how very important is it, to have a faithful friend, a minister of Christ, a St. Paul, fully enlightened in the knowledge of the truth, and bold enough to declare it to others!

The commission is arduous to execute. It is difficult in the ordinary course of life to give advice to equals. The repugnance, which men evince on being told of their faults, occasions their being seldom cautioned. How much more difficult then to speak impartially to those, in whose presence our minds

are mostly assailed with intimidating bashfulness, and who hold our life and fortune in their hands?

It behoves, notwithstanding, the ministers of Christ to maintain the dignity of their character. Never had orators a finer field for commanding attention. Never were subjects susceptible of a more grave and manly eloquence, than those which we discuss. They have motives the most powerful to press, and passions the most predominant to move. They have an eternity of glory to promise, and an eternity of misery to denounce. They are ambassadors of a Potentate, in whose presence, all the kings of the earth are but *as the small dust of the balances*. Behold St. Paul, fully impressed with the grandeur of his mission. He forgot the grandeur of Felix. He did more; he made him forget himself. He made him receive admonition with reverence. *He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.*

Ministers of Jesus Christ, here is our tutor, who prepares us for the sanctuary. And you, Christians, here is our apology. You complain when we interfere with the shameful secrets of your vice; consider St. Paul. He is the model God has set before us. He requires us to speak with freedom and force; to exhort *in season, and out of season*; to thunder in our pulpits; to go even to your houses, and disturb that fatal security which the sinner enjoys in the commission of his crimes. He requires us to say, to the revenue-officers, *exact no more than that which is appointed*; to the soldiers, *do violence to no man, and be content with your wages*: to Herod, *it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother Philip's wife*

Luke iii. 12, 13, 14. You are not higher than Felix, neither are we in chains like St. Paul. But though we were yet more deeply abased ; and though the character we sustain seemed to you yet more vile ; and though to the rank of Jewish governor, you should superadd, that of Roman emperor, and sovereign of the world ; despising all this vain parade, we would maintain the majesty of our Master. So St. Paul conducted himself before Felix, and Drusilla. *He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.*

But who can here supply the brevity of the historian, and report the whole of what the apostle said to Felix, on these important points ? It seems to me, in imagination, that I hear him enforcing those important truths he has left us in his works, and placing in the fullest lustre those divine maxims interspersed in our Scriptures. *He reasoned of righteousness.* There he maintained the rights of the widow and the orphan. He made it evident, that kings and magistrates are established to maintain the rights of the people, and not to indulge their own caprice : that the design of supreme authority is to make the whole happy by the vigilance of one, and not to gratify one at the expence of all : that it is meanness of mind to oppress the wretched who have no defence but cries and tears : that nothing is so unworthy of an enlightened man as that ferocity, with which some are inspired by dignity ; and which obstructs their respect for human nature, when undisguised by wordly pomp : that there is nothing so noble as goodness and grandeur, associated in the same character : that this

is the highest felicity : that in some sort it transforms the soul into the image of God ; who, from the high abodes of majesty in which he dwells surrounded with angels and cherubim, deigns to look down on this mean world which we inhabit, and *leaves not himself without witness, doing good to all.*

*He reasoned of temperance.* There, he would paint the licentious effects of voluptuousness. There, he would demonstrate how opposite this propensity is to the Spirit of the gospel ; which every where enjoins retirement, mortification, and self-denial. He would show how it degrades the finest characters, who have suffered it to predominate. Intemperance renders the mind incapable of reflection. It debases the heart. It debilitates the mind. It unnerves the soul. He would demonstrate the meanness of a man called to preside over a great people, who should expose his foibles to public view ; not having resolution to conceal, much less to vanquish them. With Drusilla, he would make human motives supply the defects of divine ; with Felix, he would make divine motives supply the defects of human. He would make this impudent woman feel that nothing on earth is more odious than a woman destitute of honour ; that modesty is an appendage of the sex ; that an attachment, uncemented by virtue, cannot long subsist ; that those who receive illicit favours, are the first, according to the fine remark of a sacred historian, to detest the indulgence : *The hatred wherewith Amnon, son of David, hated his sister, after the gratification of his brutal passion, was greater than the love wherewith he loved her,* 2 Sam. xiii. 15. He would make



Felix perceive, that however the depravity of the age might seem to tolerate a criminal intercourse with the sex, with God, who has called us all to equal purity, the crime was not less heinous.

*He reasoned, in short, of a judgment to come.* And here he would magnify his ministry. When our discourses are regarded as connected only with the present period, their force I grant is of no avail. We speak for a Master, who has left us clothed with infirmities; which discover no illustrious marks of Him, by whom we are sent. We have only our voice, only our exhortations, only our intreaties. Nature is not inverted at our pleasure. The visitations of heaven do not descend at our command to punish your indolence and revolts: that power was very limited even to the apostles. The idea of a future state, the solemnities of a general judgment supply our weakness; and St. Paul enforced this motive; he proved its reality: he delineated its lustre, he displayed its pomp. He resounded in the ears of Felix, the noise, the voices, the trumpets. He shewed him the small and great, the rich man and Lazarus, Felix the favourite of Cæsar, and Paul the captive of Felix, awoke by that awful voice; *Arise ye dead, and come to judgment.*

But let us not be precipitate in commending the apostle's preaching. Its encomiums will best appear by attending to its effects on the mind of Felix. St. Jerome wished concerning a preacher of his time, that the tears of his audience might compose the eulogy of his sermons. We shall find in the fears of Felix occasion to applaud the eloquence of our apos-



tle. We shall find that his discourses were thunder and lightning in the congregations; as the Greeks used to say concerning one of their orators. While St. Paul preached, Felix felt indescribable emotions in his mind. The recollection of his past life; the sight of his present sins; Drusilla, the object of his passion and subject of his crime; the courage of St. Paul; all terrified him. His *heart burned within him*, while that disciple of Jesus Christ expounded the Scriptures. The word of God was quick and powerful. The apostle, armed with the two-edged sword, dividing the soul, the joints, and the marrow, carried conviction to the heart. Felix trembled, adds our historian, Felix trembled! The fears of Felix are our second reflection.

II. What a surprising scene, my brethren, is here presented to your view! The governor trembled, and the captive spoke without dismay. The captive made the governor tremble. The governor shivered in presence of the captive. It would not be surprising, brethren, if we should make an impression on your hearts, (and we should do so indeed, if our ministry is not, as usual, a sound of empty words:) it would not be surprising if we should make some impression on the hearts of our hearers. This sanctuary, these solemnities, these groans, this silence, these arguments, these efforts,—all aid our ministry, and unite to convince and persuade you. But here is an orator destitute of these extraneous aids: behold him without any ornament but the truth he preached. What do I say, that he was destitute of extraneous aids? See him in a situation quite the re-

verse ;—a captive, loaded with irons, standing before his judge. Yet he made Felix tremble. Felix trembled ! Whence proceeded this fear, and this confusion ? Nothing is more worthy of your inquiry. Here we must stop for a moment : follow us while we trace this fear to its source. We shall consider the character of Felix under different views : as *a heathen*, imperfectly acquainted with a future judgment, and the life to come : as *a prince*, or *governor*, accustomed to see every one humbled at his feet : as *an avaricious magistrate*, loaded with extortions and crimes : in short, as *a voluptuous man*, who had never restricted the gratification of his senses. These are so many causes of Felix's fears.

First ; we shall consider Felix as *a heathen*, imperfectly acquainted with a future judgment, and the life to come : I say, imperfectly acquainted, and not as wholly ignorant, the heathens having the *work of the law written in their hearts*. Rom. ii. 15. The force of habit had corrupted nature, but had not effaced its laws. They acknowledged a judgment to come, but their notions were confused concerning its nature.

Such were the principles of Felix ; or rather, such was the imperfection of his principles, when he heard this discourse of St. Paul. You may infer his fears from his character. Figure to yourselves a man, hearing for the first time, the maxims of equity and righteousness inculcated in the gospel. Figure to yourselves, a man who heard corrected the immorality of Pagan theology, what was doubtful, illustrated ; and what was right, enforced. See a man, who,

knew of no other God but the incestuous Jupiter the lascivious Venus, taught that he must appear before Him, in whose presence the seraphim veil their faces, and the heavens are not clean. Behold a man, whose notions were confused concerning the state of souls after death, apprized that God shall judge the world in righteousness. See a man, who saw described the smoke, the fire, the chains of darkness, the outer darkness, the lake of fire and brimstone; and who saw them delineated by one animated by the Spirit of God. What consternation must have been excited by these terrific truths!

This we are incapable adequately to comprehend. We must surmount the insensibility, acquired by custom. It is but too true, that our hearts, instead of being impressed by these truths, in proportion to their discussion—our hearts are the more obdurate. We hear them without alarm, having so frequently heard them before. But if, like Felix, we had been brought up in the darkness of Paganism; and if another Paul should come and open our eyes, and unveil those sacred terrors, how exceedingly should we fear? This was the case with Felix. He perceived the bandage to drop in a moment, which conceals the sight of futurity. He heard St. Paul, that herald of grace, and ambassador to the Gentiles. He heard him reason on temperance, and a judgment to come. His soul was amazed; his heart trembled; his knees smote one against another.

Amazing effects, my brethren, of conscience! evident argument of the vanity of those gods, which idolatry adores, after it has given them form! Jupi-

ter and Mercury, it is true, had their altars in the temples of the heathens; but the God of heaven and earth has *his* tribunal in the *heart*: and, while idolatry presents its incense to sacrilegious and incestuous deities, the God of heaven and earth, reveals his terrors to the conscience, and there loudly condemns both incest and sacrilege.

Secondly, consider Felix, as *a prince*; and you will find in this high office, a second cause of his fear. When we perceive the great men of the earth devoid of every principle of religion, and even ridiculing those very truths which are the objects of our faith; we feel that faith to waver. They excite a certain suspicion in the mind, that our sentiments are only prejudices; which have become rooted in man, brought up in the obscurity of humble life. Here is the apology of religion. The Caligulas, the Neros, those potentates of the universe, have trembled in their turn, as well as the meanest of their subjects. This independence of mind, so conspicuous among libertines, is consequently an art,—not of disengaging themselves from prejudices,—but of shutting their eyes against the light, and of extinguishing the purest sentiments of the human heart. Felix, educated in a court, fraught with the maxims of the great, instantly ridicules the apostle's preaching. St. Paul, undismayed, attacks him, and finds a conscience concealed in his bosom: the very dignity of Felix is constrained to aid our apostle, by adding weight to his ministry. He demolishes the edifice of Felix's pride. He shews, that if a great nation was dependant on his pleasure, he himself was de-



pendant on a sovereign, in whose presence the kings of the earth are as nothing. He proves, that dignities are so very far from exempting men from the judgment of God; that, for this very reason, their account becomes the more weighty, riches being a trust which Heaven has committed to the great: and *where much is given, much is required*. He makes him feel this awful truth, that princes are responsible, not only for their own souls, but also for those of their subjects; their good or bad example influencing, for the most part, the people committed to their care.

See then Felix in one moment deprived of his tribunal. The judge became a party. He saw himself rich and in need of nothing; and yet he was *blind, and naked, and poor*. He heard a voice from the God of the whole earth, saying unto him, *Thou profane and wicked prince, remove the diadem, and take off the crown. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more*, Ezek. xxi. 25, 26. *Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord*, Obad. 4. Neither the dignity of governor, nor the favour of Cæsar, nor all the glory of empire, shall deliver thee out of my hand.

Thirdly; I restrict myself, my brethren, as much as possible, in order to execute without exceeding my limits, the plan I have conceived; and proceed to consider Felix as an *avaricious man*, to consider in this disposition *a further cause of his fear*. Felix was avaricious, and St. Paul instantly transported him into a world, in which avarice shall receive its



appropriate and most distinguished punishment. For, you know that the grand test by which we shall be judged is *charity*. *I was hungry, and ye gave me meat*; and, of all the obstructions of charity, covetousness is the most obstinate and insurmountable.

This unhappy propensity renders us insensible of our neighbour's necessities. It magnifies the estimate of our wants: it diminishes the wants of others. It persuades us that we have need of all, that others have need of nothing. Felix began to perceive the iniquity of this passion, and to feel that he was guilty of double idolatry. Idolatry in morality: idolatry in religion. Idolatry in having offered incense to gods, who were not the makers of heaven and earth; idolatry in having offered incense to mammon. For, the Scriptures teach, and experience confirms, *that covetousness is idolatry*. The covetous man is not a worshipper of the true God. Gold and silver are the divinities he adores. His heart is with his treasure. Here then is the portrait of Felix;—a portrait drawn by St. Paul in the presence of Felix; and which reminded this prince of innumerable prohibitions, innumerable frauds, innumerable extortions; of the widow and the orphan he had oppressed. Here is the cause of Felix's fears. According to an expression of St. James, *the rust of his gold and silver began to witness against him, and to eat his flesh as with fire*, James v. 3.

Fourthly; consider Felix as a *voluptuous man*. Here is the final cause of his fear. Without repeating all we have said on the depravity of this passion, let one remark suffice; that, if the torments of hell are

tremendous to all, they must be peculiarly so to the voluptuous. The voluptuous man never restricts his sensual gratification; his soul dies on the slightest approach of pain. What a terrific impression must not the thought of judgment make on such a character! Shall I, accustomed to indulgence and pleasure, become a prey to the worm that dieth not, and fuel to the fire which is not quenched! Shall I, who avoid pain with so much caution, be condemned to eternal torments! Shall I have neither delicious meats, nor voluptuous delights! This body, my idol, which I habituate to so much delicacy, shall it be *cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, whose smoke ascendeth up for ever and ever!* And this effeminate habit I have of refining on pleasure, will it render me only the more sensible of my destruction and anguish!

Such are the traits of Felix's character; such are the causes of Felix's fear. Happy if his fear had produced that *godly sorrow, and that repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.* Happy, if the fear of hell had induced him to avoid his torments. But, ah no! he feared, and yet persisted in the causes of his fear. He trembled, yet said to St. Paul, *Go thy way for this time.* This is our last reflection.

III. How preposterous, my brethren, is the sinner! What absurdities does he cherish in his heart! For, in short, had the doctrines St. Paul preached to Felix been the productions of his brain;—had the idea, which he gave him of rectitude and injustice, been a prejudice;—had the thought of a future judgment been a chimera, whence proceeded the fears of Felix? Why was he so weak as to admit this panic

of terror? If, on the contrary, Paul had truth and argument on his side, why did Felix send him away? Such are the contradictions of the sinner. He wishes, he revolts. He denies, he grants; he trembles, and says, *Go thy way for this time.* Speak to him concerning the truths of religion; open hell to his view, and you will see him affected, devout, and appalled; follow him in life, and you will find that these truths have no influence whatever on his conduct.

But are we not mistaken concerning Felix? Did not the speech of St. Paul make a deeper impression upon him than we seem to allow? He sent the apostle away, it is true, but it was *for this time* only. And who can censure this delay? We cannot be always recollected and retired. The infirmities of human nature require relaxation and repose. Felix could afterwards recal him. *Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee.*

It pains me, I confess, my brethren, in entering on this head of my discourse, that I should exhibit to you in the person of Felix, the portrait of whom? Of wicked men? Alas! of nearly the whole of this assembly; most of whom seem to us living in negligence and vice, running with the children of this world *to the same excess of riot.* One would suppose, that they had already made their choice, having embraced one or the other of these notions, either that religion is a phantom; or that, all things considered, it is better to endure the torments of hell, than to be restricted to the practice of virtue. No, indeed, that is not their notion. Ask the worst

among them. Ask whether they have renounced their salvation? You will not find a single soul, who will say, that he has renounced it. Ask them again, whether they think it attainable by following this way of life? They will answer, No. Ask them next, How they reconcile things so opposite, as their life, and their hope? They will answer, that they are resolved to reform, and by and by they will enter on the work. They will say, as Felix said to St. Paul, *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* Nothing is less wise than this delay. At a future period I will reform. But who has assured me, that at a future period I shall have opportunities of conversion? Who has assured me, that God will continue to call me, and that another Paul shall thunder in my ears?

I will reform at a future period! But who has told me, that God at a future period will accompany his word with the powerful aids of grace? While Paul may plant, and Apollos water, is it not God who gives the increase? How then can I flatter myself, that the Holy Spirit will continue to knock at the door of my heart, after I shall have so frequently obstructed his admission?

I will reform in future! But who has told me, that I shall even desire to be converted? Do not habits become confirmed, in proportion as they are indulged? And is not an inveterate evil very difficult to cure? If I cannot bear the excision of a slight gangrene, how shall I sustain the operation when the wound is deep?



I will reform in future ! But who has told me, that I shall live to a future period ? Does not death advance every moment with gigantic strides ? Does he not assail the prince in his palace, and the peasant in his cottage ? Does he not send before him monitors and messengers ;—acute pains, which wholly absorb the soul ;—deliriums, that render reason of no avail ;—deadly stupors, which benumb the brightest and most piercing geniusses ? And, what is still more awful, does he not daily come without either warning or messenger ? Does he not snatch away this man without allowing him time to be acquainted with the essentials of religion ; and that man, without the restitution of riches ill-acquired ; and the other, before he is reconciled to his enemy ?

Instead of saying, *Go thy way for this time*, we should say, Stay for this time. Stay, while the Holy Spirit is knocking at the door of my heart ; stay while my conscience is alarmed ; stay, while I yet live ; *while it is called to-day*. Thy arguments confound my conscience : no matter. *Thy hand is heavy upon me* : no matter still. Cut, strike, consume ; provided it procure my salvation.

But, however criminal this delay may be, we seem desirous to excuse it. *Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee*. It was Felix's business then, which induced him to put off the apostle. Unhappy business ! Awful occupation ! It seems an enviable situation, my brethren, to be placed at the head of a province, to speak in the language of majesty ; to decide on the fortunes of a numerous people, and in all cases



to be the ultimate judge. But those situations, so happy and so dazzling in appearance, are extremely dangerous to the conscience! Those innumerable concerns, this noise and bustle, entirely dissipate the soul. While so much engaged on earth, we cannot be mindful of heaven. When we have no leisure, we say to St. Paul, *Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

Happy he, who, amid the tumult of the most active life has hours consecrated to reflection, to the examination of his conscience, and to ensure the *one thing needful*! Or rather, happy he, who, in the repose of the middle classes of society,—placed between indigence and affluence,—far from the courts of the great,—having neither poverty nor riches according to Agur's wish, can in retirement and quietness see life sweetly glide away, and make salvation, if not his sole, yet his principal concern!

Felix not only preferred his business to his salvation, but he mentions it with evasive disdain. *When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.—When I have a convenient season.* Might we not thence infer, that the truths, discussed by St. Paul, were not of serious importance? Might we not infer, that the soul of Felix was created for the government of Judea; and that the grand doctrines of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come, ought to serve at most but to pass away the time, or merely to engross our leisure? *When I have a convenient season.*

Ah ! unhappy Felix, what hast thou to do of such vast importance ? Is it to execute the imperial commission ? But art thou not a subject of the King of kings, in whose presence Cæsar himself is but a worm of earth ? Has not God given thee a soul to improve, virtues to acquire, and an eternal kingdom to conquer ? Was it to immerse thyself in sensual pleasures ? But how canst thou taste those pleasures, after the terrific portrait of a future judgment, which has been exhibited to thy view ? Does not the voice of St. Paul perpetually resound in thy ears ; and, like a fury obstinately attending thy steps, does it not disturb thy indolence and voluptuous delights ?

Suspending here the course of our meditation, let us close by a few reflections on the truths we have delivered. We have affirmed in the body of this discourse, and with the greatest propriety, that we should commence the application with regard to ourselves. St. Paul here communicates an important lesson to all ministers of the gospel. His sincerity, his courage, his constancy, are perfect models ; on which every faithful pastor should form himself. Let us follow, my most honoured brethren, this illustrious model. *Let us be followers of him, even as he was of Christ.* Like him, let us never temporize with the sinner. Like him, let us speak of righteousness to the covetous ; of temperance to the voluptuous ; of a future judgment to the great of this world, and to all those whom objects less terrific are incapable to alarm. Let us never say, *peace, peace, when there is no peace.* Let us thunder, let us expostulate, let us shoot against them the arrows of

the Almighty's wrath ; nor fear the Felixes and Drusillas of our age. Here is our vocation. Here is the charge which God now delivers to every one who has the honour of succeeding Paul in the order of the ministry.

But how shall we discharge the duty ? What murmuring would not a similar liberty excite among our hearers ? If we should address you as St. Paul addressed Felix ; if we should declare war against you individually ; if we should unmask the many mysteries of iniquity in which you are involved ; if we should rend the veil which covers so many dishonourable practices ; you would interrupt us ; you would retaliate on our weakness and infirmities ; you would say, *Go thy way for this time ;* carry elsewhere a ministry so disgustful and grating.

We would wish fully to accommodate ourselves to your taste. We would wish to pay all deference to your understanding, and respect even a false delicacy. But if we exercise this indulgence towards you, permit us to expect the same in return, and to make for the moment this chimerical supposition.

You know the character of St. Paul ; at least you ought to know it. If you are unacquainted with it, the discourse he delivered, in the presence of Felix, is sufficient to delineate its excellence. Suppose, instead of the sermon you have heard, that St. Paul had addressed this assembly. Suppose, instead of what we have now advanced, this apostle had preached, and filled the place in which we now stand. Suppose, that St. Paul, that sincere preacher ; that man, who, before Felix and Drusilla, *reasoned of righte-*

*ousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.* Suppose he had preached to-day before the multitude now present : let us speak ingenuously. What sort of application would he have made? What subject would he have discussed? What vices would he have reproofed? What estimate would he have formed of most of your lives? What judgment would we have entertained concerning this worldly spirit, which captivates so great a multitude? What would he have said of that insatiable avarice in the acquisition of wealth, which actuates the general mass; which makes us like the grave, incessantly crying, give, give, and never says, it is enough? What would he have said concerning the indifference about religion said to be found among many of us, as though the sacrifices, formerly made for our reformation, had been the last efforts of an expiring religion, which no longer leaves the slightest trace upon the mind? What would he have said of those infamous debaucheries apparently sanctioned by a frantic custom, and which ought not to be named among Christians? Extend the supposition. It is St. Paul who delivers those admonitions. It is Paul himself who expands to your view the hell he opened before Felix and Drusilla; who conjures you by the awful glory of the God, who will judge the living and the dead, to reform your lives, and assume a conduct correspondent to the Christian name, you have the honour to bear.

To the ministry of the apostle, we will join, exhortations, entreaties, and fervent prayers. We conjure you by the mercies of that God who took his



Son from his own bosom and gave him for you, and by the value of your salvation, to yield to a ministry so pathetic.

Be mindful of *righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*. Observe this equity in your dealings: never indulge the propensity to unlawful gain. *Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*, Mark xii. 17. Respect the rights of the sovereign. *Pay tribute to whom tribute is due*, Rom. xiii. 7. Let the indigence and obscurity of your labourers, and lowest artists, be respectable in your sight; recollecting that the *little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked*, Psalm xxxvii. 16. Do not narrow the rules of rectitude: keep it in view, that God did not send you into the world to live for yourselves.—To live solely for ourselves is a maxim altogether unbecoming a Christian; and to entrench ourselves in hoards of gold and silver, placed above the vicissitudes of human life, is a conduct the most incompatible with that religion whose sole characteristic is compassion and benevolence.

Observe also this *temperance*. Exclude luxury from every avenue of your heart. Renounce all unlawful pleasures, and every criminal intrigue. Caution your conduct, especially in this licentious place, in which the facility of vice, is a continual temptation to its charms. Let your chastity be apparent in your dress, in your furniture, in your conversation. *Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt*, Col. iv. 6. According to St. Peter's advice, *Let not the adorning of women be that outward*



*adorning, of plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or of putting on of apparel: but let it be the hidden man of the heart, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.* Recollect, that the law of God is spiritual; that there is an impurity of the mind, an adultery of the heart; that certain desires to please, certain artful emotions, certain lascivious airs, and certain attempts to wound the virtue of others, (though we may apparently observe the most rigid rules of decorum,) may be as heinous before God as the most glaring faults into which a man may have been reluctantly precipitated by his passions, and in which the will may have had the less concern.

Keep constantly in view, *the judgment to come.* Think, O think that an invisible eye watches over all your actions. Think that they are all registered in a faithful journal which shall be produced before the universe, in the great day, when Jesus Christ shall descend in glory from heaven.

My dear brethren, be not ingenious to enfeeble conviction by accounting the object remote. The trumpet is ready to sound, the books are about to be opened, and the throne is already prepared. The views of the soul are circumscribed, like the sight of the body. The narrow circle of surrounding objects engrosses nearly the whole of our attention; and retards the extension of thought to superior concerns. The reality of a judgment, comprises so many amazing revolutions in the universe, that we cannot regard the design as ready for execution. We cannot con-

ceive the face of nature to change with such rapidity ; and that those awful revolutions which must precede the advent of the Son of God, may occur in a few ages. But let us not be deceived. I grant, you are right in the principle, but you err in the consequence. There is nothing in the most distant occurrence of this period which can flatter security. If the judgment is remote with regard to the world, it is near with respect to you. It is not necessary, with regard to you, for the face of nature to be changed, the Jews to be called into the covenant, the sound of the gospel to go to the end of the earth, the moon to be turned to darkness, the stars to fall from heaven, the elements to melt with fervent heat, the heavens to pass away with a great noise, and the earth to be dissolved. There is only wanting a deficiency of humours in your body ; only a little blood out of its place ; only some fibre disorganized ; only an inflammation in the head, a little diminution, or augmentation of heat or cold, in the brain ;—and, behold your sentence is pronounced. Behold, with regard to you, the world overturned, the sun darkened, the moon become bloody, the gospel preached, the Jews converted, the elements dissolved, the heavens folded up as a garment, the foundations of the earth shaken, and its fashion passed away.

Enter seriously into these reflections. And, since each of the duties we have prescribed requires time and labour, avoid dissipation and excess of business. My brethren, it is here that we would redouble our zeal, and would yet find the way to your hearts. We will not enter into the detail of your engage-

ments ; we will not turn over the pages of your account. We will not visit your counting-houses. We will not even put the question, whether your business is always lawful ; whether the rights of the sovereign and the individual are punctually discharged. We will suppose that all is fair on these points. But consider only that the most innocent engagements become criminal, when pursued with excessive application, and preferred to the work of salvation.

This maxim belongs to you, merchants, dealers, tradesmen. You see at this period, the poverty and wretchedness which assail an infinite number of families. The soldier languishes in the midst of war without employment, and he is in some sort obliged to beg his bread. The nobleman, far from his means,—a thousand times more unhappy than the peasant—has no industry to procure his bread. The learned man is even a burden ; and the productions of the greatest geniuses, so far from receiving remuneration, are not even noticed.

Amid such a series of calamities, you alone have means for the acquisition of riches. A government mild and lenient, a commerce vast and productive opens, if I may so speak, all the avenues of fortune. The eastern and western world seem to concur in the augmentation of your wealth. You live not only with ease, but elegance. Your houses are sumptuously furnished, your tables deliciously served : and after the enjoyment of these advantages, you transmit them to posterity ; even after death you still taste and enjoy them in the persons of your children.

But it would have been a thousand times better that you should have lived to augment the number of the wretched; if you permit these favours of heaven to frustrate your salvation; and put off the apostle, saying, as the unhappy Felix, *When I have a convenient season, I will recal thee. Go thy way for this time.* I have payments to meet, I have orders to write.

Let us seclude ourselves from bustle and tumult. Let us seek retirement, recollection, and silence. And may the death which is at hand, expressing myself with a prophet, induce us to *make haste, and not delay returning to the testimonies of the Lord,* Psalm cxix. 59, 60.

My brethren, you are not sufficiently impressed with this thought. But we,—we, to whom God has committed the superintendence of a great people;—we, if I may so speak, who are called to exercise our ministry in a world of dead and dying men, who see lopped off in succession, every member of a numerous flock; we are alarmed, when we consider the delays which predominate in the conduct of most Christians. We never ascend the pulpit, but it seems that we address you for the last time. It seems that we should exhaust the whole of religion, to pluck our heroes from the world, and never let them go till we have entrusted them in the arms of Jesus Christ. It seems that we should bid you an eternal farewell; that we are stretched on our bed of death, and that you are in a similar situation.

Yes, Christians, this is the only moment on which we can reckon. It is, perhaps, the only *acceptable*



time. It is, perhaps, the last day of our *visitation*. Let us improve a period so precious. Let us no longer say,—by and by—at another time ; but let us---to-day---this moment---even now. Let the pastor say, I have been insipid in my sermons, and remiss in my conduct ; having been more solicitous during the exercise of my ministry, to advance my family, than to build up the Lord's house. I will preach hereafter with fervour and with zeal. I will be vigilant, sober, rigorous, and disinterested. Let the miser say, I have riches ill-acquired. I will purge my house of illicit wealth. I will overturn the altar of mammon, and erect another to the Supreme Jehovah. Let the prodigal say, I will extinguish the unhappy fires by which I am consumed, and kindle in my bosom the flame of divine love. Ah, unhappy passions, which war against my soul ; sordid attachments ; irregular propensities ; emotions of concupiscence ; law in the members ; I will know you no more, I will make with you an eternal divorce, I will, from this moment open my heart to the Eternal Wisdom, who condescends to ask it.

If we are in this happy disposition, if we thus become regenerate, we shall enjoy from this moment, foretastes of the glory, which God has prepared. From this moment, the truths of religion, so far from casting discouragement and terror on the soul, shall heighten its consolation and joy ; from this moment, heaven shall open on this audience, paradise shall descend into your heart, and the Holy Spirit shall come and dwell there. He will bring that peace, and those joys, which pass all understanding. And,



commencing our felicity on earth, he shall give us the earnest of his consummation. God grant us the grace ! To him, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.

## SERMON VIII.

*On the Covenant of God with the Israelites.*



DEUTERONOMY XXIX. 10—19.

*Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood, unto the drawer of thy water: that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not herewith us this day: (for ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the nations which ye passed by. And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them) lest there should be among you man or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be*

*among you a root that beareth gall and worm-wood, and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart.*

**MY** brethren, this sabbath is a covenant-day between God and us. This is the design of our sacraments; and the particular design of the holy supper we have celebrated in the morning-service. So our chatechists teach; so our children understand; and among the less instructed of this assembly there is scarcely one, if we should ask him what is a sacrament, but he would answer, "it is a symbol of the covenant between God and Christians."

This being understood, we cannot observe without astonishment the slight attention, most men pay to an institution; of which they seem to entertain such exalted notions. The tendency would not be happy in conciliating your attention to this discourse, were I to commence by a humiliating portrait of the manners of the age; in which some of you would have occasion to recognize your own character. But the fact is certain, and I attest it to your consciences. Do we take the same precaution in contracting a covenant with God in the eucharist; which is exercised in a treaty on which the prosperity of the state, or domestic happiness depends? When the latter is in question, we confer with experienced men, we weigh the terms, and investigate with all possible sagacity, what we stipulate, and what is stipulated in return. But when we come to renew the high covenant, in

which the immortal God condescends to be our God, in which we devote ourselves to him, we deem the slightest examination every way sufficient. We frequently even repel with indignation a judicious man, who would venture, by way of caution, to ask, "What are you going to do? What engagements are you going to form? What calamities are you about to bring on yourselves?"

One grand cause of this defect, proceeds, it is presumed, from our having, for the most part, inadequate notions of what is called contracting, or renewing, our covenant with God. We commonly confound the terms, by vague or confused notions: hence one of the best remedies we can apply to an evil so general is, to explain their import with precision. Having searched from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, for the happiest text affording a system complete and clear on the subject, I have fixed on the words you have heard. They are part of the discourse Moses addressed to the Israelites, when he arrived on the frontiers of the promised land, and was about to give an account of the most important ministry God had ever entrusted to any mortal.

I enter now upon the subject. And after having again implored the aid of Heaven; after having conjured you, by the compassion of God, who this day pours upon us such an abundance of favours, to give so important a subject the consideration it deserves; I lay down at once a principle generally received among Christians. The legal, and the evangelical covenant. The covenant God contracted with the Israelites by the ministry of Moses, and the covenant

he has contracted this morning with you, differ only in circumstances, being in substance the same. Properly speaking, God has contracted but one covenant with man since the fall, the covenant of grace upon mount Sinai; whose terrific glory induced the Israelites to say, *Let not God speak with us, lest we die*, *Exod. xx. 19.* Amid so much lightnings and thunders, devouring fire, darkness and tempest; and notwithstanding this prohibition, which apparently precluded all intercourse between God and sinful man, *Take heed—go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through*; upon this mountain, I say, in this barren wilderness, were instituted the tenderest ties God ever formed with his creature: amid the awful punishments which we see so frequently fall upon those rebellious men; amid fiery serpents which exhaled against them a pestilential breath, God shed upon them the same grace he so abundantly pours on our assemblies. The Israelites to whom Moses addresses the words of my text, had the same sacraments: *they were all baptized in the cloud; they did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ*, *1 Cor. x. 2, 3.* The same appellations; it was said to them as to you, *If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, for all the earth is mine*, *Exod. xix. 5.* The same promises; *for they saw the promises afar off, and embraced them*, *Heb. xi. 13.*



On the other hand, amid the consolatory objects which God displays before us at this period, in distinguished lustre; and notwithstanding these gracious words which resound in this church, *Grace, grace unto it.* Notwithstanding this engaging voice, *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden;* and amid the abundant mercy we have seen displayed this morning at the Lord's table; if we should violate the covenant he has established with us, you have the same cause of fear as the Jews. We have the same Judge, equally awful now, as at that period; *for our God is a consuming fire,* Heb. xii. 29. We have the same judgments to apprehend. *With many of them, God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were for our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them. Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed, and fell in one day twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer,* 1 Cor. x. 5—10. You know the language of St. Paul.

Further still: whatever superiority our condition may have over the Jews: in whatever more attracting manner he may have now revealed himself to us; whatever more tender bands, and gracious cords of love God may have employed, to use an expression of a prophet, will serve only to augment our misery, if we prove unfaithful. *For if the word spoken by*

*angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward ; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? Heb. ii. 2, 3. For ye are not come unto the mountain that might not be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh : for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven, Heb. xii. 18—25.*

Hence the principle respecting the legal, and evangelical covenant is indisputable. The covenant God formerly contracted with the Israelites by the ministry of Moses, and the covenant he has made with us this morning in the sacrament of the holy supper are in substance the same. And what the legislator said of the first, in the words of my text, we may say of the second, in the explication we shall give. Now, my brethren, this faithful servant of God required the Israelites to consider five things in the covenant they contracted with their Maker.

I. The sanctity of the place : *Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord* ; that is, before his ark, the most august symbol of his presence.

II. The universality of the contract : *Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord, the captains of your tribes, your elders, your officers, and all the men of Israel : your little ones, your wives, and the stranger who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water.*

III. Its mutual obligation : *That he may, on the one hand, establish thee to-day for a people unto himself ; and on the other, that he may be unto thee a God.*

IV. The extent of the engagement : an engagement with reserve. God covenants to give himself to the Israelites, as he had sworn to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Israelites covenant to give themselves to God, and abjure not only gross, but refined idolatry. Take heed, *lest there should be among you man or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord your God, to go and serve the gods of these nations ; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood.*

V. The oath of the covenant : *Thou enterest into the covenant and the execration by an oath.*

I. Moses required the Israelites to consider the sanctity of the place in which the covenant was contracted with God. It was consecrated by the divine presence. *Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord.* Not only in the vague sense in which we say of all our words and actions, *God sees me ; God hears me ; all things are naked and open to him in*

*whose presence I stand ; but in a sense more confined. The Most High dwelleth not in human temples. What is the house ye build to me, and where is the place of my rest ? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, much less the house that I have built.* He chose however the Tabernacle for his habitation, and the Ark for his throne. There he delivered his oracles ; there he issued his supreme commands. Moses assembled the Israelites, it is presumed, near to this majestic pavilion of the Deity, when he addressed to them the words of my text ; at least I think I can prove, from correspondent passages of Scripture, that this is the true acceptance of the expression, *Before the Lord.*

The Christians having more enlightened notions of the Divinity than the Jews, have the less need to be apprized that God is an omnipresent Being, and unconfined by local residence. We have been taught by Jesus Christ, that the true worshippers restrict not their devotion to mount Zion, nor mount Gerizim : they worship God in spirit and in truth. But let us be cautious, lest, under a pretence of removing some superstitious notions, we refine too far. God presides in a peculiar manner in our temples, and in a peculiar manner even *where two or three are met together in his name* : more especially in a house consecrated to his glory ; more especially in places in which a whole nation come to pay their devotion. The more august and solemn our worship, the more is God intimately near. And what part of the worship we render to God, can be more august than that



we have celebrated this morning? In what situation can the thought, "I am seen and heard of God;" in what situation can it impress our hearts if it have not impressed them this morning?

God, in contracting this covenant with the Israelites on Sinai, which Moses induced them to renew in the words of my text, apprized them that he would be found upon that holy hill. He said to Moses, *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day, and to-morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people, upon mount Sinai*, Exod. xix. 9. It is said expressly, that Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders, should ascend the hill, and contract the covenant with God in the name of the whole congregation; they saw evident marks of the divine presence, *a paved work of sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness*; an emblem which God chose perhaps, because sapphire was among the Egyptians an emblem of royalty; as is apparent in the writings of those, who have preserved the hieroglyphics of that nation.

The eyes of your understanding, were not they also enlightened this morning? God was present in this house; he was seated here on a throne, more luminous than the brightest sapphire, and amid the myriads of his host. It was before the presence of the Lord descended in this temple as on Sinai in holiness, that we appeared this morning; when by the



august symbols of the body and blood of the Redeemer of mankind, we came again to take the oath of fidelity we have so often uttered, and so often broken. It was in the presence of God that thou didst appear, contrite heart! Penitent sinner! He discerned thy sorrows, he collected thy tears, he attested thy repentance. It was in the presence of the Lord thy God that thou didst appear, hypocrite! He unmasked thy countenance, he pierced the specious veils which covered thy wretched heart. It was in the presence of the Lord thy God that thou didst appear, wicked man! Thou, who in the very act of seeming to celebrate this sacrament of love, which should have united thee to thy brother as the soul of Jonathan was knit to David, wouldst have crushed him under thy feet. What a motive to attention, to recollection! What a motive to banish all vain thoughts; which so frequently interrupt our most sacred exercises! What a motive to exclaim, as the patriarch Jacob; *How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

II. Moses required the Israelites in renewing their covenant with God, to consider the universality of the contract. *Ye stand all of you before the Lord.* The Hebrew by descent, and the strangers; that is, the proselytes, the heads of houses, and the hewers of wood, and drawers of water; those who filled the most distinguished offices, and those who performed the meanest services in the commonwealth of Israel; the women and the children; in a word, the whole without exception of those who belonged

to the people of God. It is worthy of remark, my brethren, that God on prescribing the principal ceremonies of the law, required every soul who refused submission to be cut off; that is, to sustain an awful anathema. He hereby signified, that no one should claim the privileges of an Israelite, without conformity to all the institutions he had prescribed. So persuaded were the people of this truth, that they would have regarded as a monster, and punished as a delinquent, any man, whether an Israelite by choice, or descent, who had refused conformity to the passions, and attendance on the solemn festivals.

Would to God that Christians entertained the same sentiments! Would to God, that your preachers could say, on sacramental occasions, as Moses said to the Jews in the memorable discourse we apply to you; *Ye stand all of you this day before the Lord your God; the captains of your tribes, your elders, your officers, your wives, your little ones, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water.* But alas! how defective are our assemblies on those solemn occasions! But alas! where were you, temporizers, Nicodemuses, timorous souls? Where have you been, it is now a fortnight since you appeared before the Lord your God, to renew your covenant with him. Ah! degenerate men, worthy of the most pointed and mortifying reproof, such as that which Deborah addressed to Reuben: Why didst thou stay *among the sheep folds, to hear the bleating of the flocks?* Judges v. 16. You were with your gold, with your silver, sordid objects, to which you

pay in this nation the homage, which God peculiarly requires in climates so happy. You were perhaps in the temple of superstition; while we were assembled in the house of the Most High. You were in Egypt, preferring the garlic and onions to the milk and honey of Canaan; while we were on the borders of the promised land, to which God was about to give us admission.

Poor children of those unhappy fathers! Where were you, while we devoted our offspring to God who gave them; while we led those for admission to his table, who were adequately instructed; while we prayed for the future admission of those who are yet deprived by reason of their tender age? Ah! you were victims to the indifference, the cares, and avarice of those who gave you birth! You were associated by them with those who are enemies to the reformed name; who, unable to convince the fathers, hope, at least, to convince the children, and to extinguish in their hearts the minutest sparks of truth! O God! if thy justice have already cut off those unworthy fathers, spare, at least, according to thy clemency, these unoffending creatures, who know not yet their right hand from their left; whom they would detach from thy communion, before they are acquainted with its purity!

Would to God that this was all the cause of our complaint! Oh! where were you, while we celebrated the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? You, inhabitants of these provinces, born of reformed families, professors of the reformation! You, who are married, who are engaged in business, who have at-

tained the age of forty or fifty years, without ever participating of the holy eucharist! There was a time, my brethren, among the Jews, when a man who should have had the assurance to neglect the rites which constituted the essence of the law, would have been cut off from the people. This law has varied in regard to circumstances ; but in essence it still subsists, and in all its force. Let him apply this observation, to whom it peculiarly belongs.

III. Moses required the Israelites, in renewing their covenant with God, to consider what constituted its essence : which, according to the views of the Lawgiver, was *the reciprocal engagement*. Be attentive to this term *reciprocal* ; it is the soul of my definition. What constitutes the essence of a covenant, is the reciprocal engagements of the contracting parties. This is obvious from the words of my text ; *that thou shouldest* (stipulate or) *enter*. Here we distinctly find mutual conditions ; here we distinctly find that God engaged with the Israelites to be their God ; and they engaged to be his people. We proved, at the commencement of this discourse, that the covenant of God with the Israelites, was in substance the same as that contracted with Christians. This being considered, what idea ought we to form of those Christians, (if we may give that name to men who can entertain such singular notions of Christianity,) who ventured to affirm, that the ideas of *conditions*, and *reciprocal engagements*, are dangerous expressions, when applied to the evangelical covenant ; that what distinguishes the Jews from Christians is, that God then promised and required ;



whereas now he promises, but requires nothing. My brethren, had I devoted my studies to compose a history of the eccentricities of the human mind, I should have deemed it my duty to have bestowed several years in reading the books, in which those systems are contained ; that I might have marked to posterity the precise degrees to which men are capable of carrying such odious opinions. But having diverted them to other pursuits, little, it is confessed, have I read of this sort of work : and all I know of the subject may nearly be reduced to this, that there are persons in these provinces who both read and believe them.

Without attacking by a long course of causes and consequences, a system so destructive of itself, we will content ourselves with a single test. Let them produce a single passage from the Scriptures, in which God requires the acquisition of knowledge, and engages to bestow it, without the least fatigue of reading, study, and reflection. Let them produce a passage, in which God requires us to possess certain virtues, and engages to communicate them, without enjoining us to subdue our senses, our temperature, our passions, our inclination, in order that we may attain them. Let them produce one passage from the Scriptures to prove, that God requires us to be saved by the merits of Jesus Christ, and engages to do it, without the slightest sorrow for our past sins,—without the least reparation of our crimes,—without precautionary measures to avoid them,—without the qualifying dispositions to participate the fruits of his passion. What am I



saying! Let them produce a text which overturns the hundred, and the hundred more passages which we oppose to this gross Antinomian system, and with which we are ever ready to confront its advocates.

We have said, my brethren, that this system destroys itself. Hence it was less with a view to attack it, that we destined this article, than to apprise some among you of having adopted it, at the very moment you dream that you reject and abhor it. We often fall into the error of the ancient Israelites; frequently forming as erroneous notions of the covenant God has contracted with us, as they did of that he had contracted with them. This people had violated the stipulations in a manner the most notorious in the world. God did not fulfil his engagements with them, because they refused to fulfil their engagements to him. He resumed the blessings he had so abundantly poured upon them; and, instead of ascribing the cause to themselves, they had the assurance to ascribe it to him. They said, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*, Jer. vii. 4. We are the children of Abraham; forget not thy covenant.—And how often have not similar sentiments been cherished in our hearts? How often has not the same language been heard proceeding from our lips? How often, at the moment we violate our baptismal vows; at the moment we are so far depraved as to falsify the oath of fidelity we have taken in the holy sacrament; how often, in short, does it not happen, that at the moment we break our covenant with God, we require him to be faithful by alleging,—the cross—the satisfaction—

the blood of Jesus Christ. Ah! wretched man! fulfil thou the conditions to which thou hast subscribed; and God will fulfil those he has imposed on himself. Be thou mindful of thy engagements; and God will not be forgetful of his. Hence, what constitutes the essence of a covenant is, the mutual stipulations of the contracting parties. This is what we engaged to prove.

IV. Moses required the Israelites to consider, in renewing their covenant with God, the extent of the engagement: *That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath; that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself; and that he may be unto thee a God.* This engagement of God with the Jews implies, that he would be their God; or to comprehend the whole in a single word, that he would procure them a happiness correspondent to the eminence of his perfections. Cases occur, in which the attributes of God are at variance with the happiness of men. It implies, for instance, an inconsistency with the divine perfections, not only that the wicked should be happy, but also that the righteous should have perfect felicity, while their purity is incomplete. There are miseries inseparable from our imperfection in holiness; and, imperfections being coeval with life, our happiness will be incomplete till after death. On the removal of this obstruction, by virtue of the covenant, God having engaged to be our God, we shall attain supreme felicity. Hence our Saviour proved by this argument, that Abraham should rise from the dead, the Lord having said to Moses, *I am the*

*God of Abraham ; God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*, Matt. xxii. 32. This assertion, *I am the God of Abraham*, proceeding from the mouth of the Supreme Being, was equivalent to a promise of making Abraham perfectly happy. Now he could not be perfectly happy, so long as the body to which nature had united him, was the victim of corruption. Therefore, Abraham must rise from the dead.

When God engaged with the Israelites, the Israelites engaged with God. Their covenant implies, that they should be *his people* ; that is, that they should obey his precepts so far as human frailty would admit. By virtue of this clause, they engaged not only to abstain from gross idolatry, but also to eradicate the principle. Keep this distinction in view : it is clearly expressed in my text. *Ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold. Take heed, lest there should be among you man or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away from the Lord, to go and serve the gods of these nations.* Here is the gross act of idolatry. *Lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood.* Here is the principle. I would not enter into a critical illustration of the original terms, which our versions render *gall and wormwood*. They include a metaphor taken from a man, who, finding in his field weeds pernicious to his grain, should crop the strongest, but neglecting to eradicate the plant, incurs the inconvenience he wished to avoid.

The metaphor is pertinent. In every crime, we consider both the plant and the root productive of gall and wormwood; or, if you please, the crime itself, and the principle which produced it. It is not enough to crop, we must eradicate. It is not enough to be exempt from crimes, we must exterminate the principle. For example, in theft, there is both the root, and the plant productive of wormwood and gall. There is theft gross and refined; the act of theft, and the principle of theft. To steal the goods of a neighbour is the act, the gross act of theft: but, to indulge an exorbitant wish for the acquisition of wealth;—to make enormous charges;—to resist the solicitations of a creditor for payment;—to be indelicate as to the means of gaining money;—to reject the mortifying claims of restitution, is refined fraud; or, if you please, the principle of fraud productive of wormwood and gall.—It is the same with regard to impurity; there is the act and the principle. The direct violation of the command, *thou shalt not commit adultery*, is the gross act. But to form intimate connexions with persons habituated to the vice, to read licentious novels, to sing immodest songs, to indulge wanton airs, is that refined impurity, that principle of the gross act, that root which speedily produces wormwood and gall.

V. Moses lastly required the Israelites to consider the oath and execration with which their acceptance of the covenant was attended: *that thou shouldst enter into covenant, and into this oath*. What is meant by their entering into the oath of execration?



That they pledged themselves by oath, to fulfil every clause of the covenant; and in case of violation, to subject themselves to all the curses God had denounced against those who should be guilty of so perfidious a crime.

And, if you would have an adequate idea of those curses, read the awful chapter preceding that from which we have taken our text, "If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and do all his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field; in the fruit of thy body, in the fruit of thy land, in the increase of thy cattle. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing and vexation, in all thou settest thine hand for to do, until thou be destroyed; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. And thy heaven, that is over thy head, shall be brass; and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies, thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them; and thou shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people. Thine eyes shall see it; because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things. Therefore thou shalt serve thine en-



emies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, nakedness, and want. The Lord shall bring against thee a nation swift as the eagle; a nation of fierce countenance. He shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thy own body, the flesh of thy sons and thy daughters, in the siege, and in the straightness. So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil towards his brother, and towards the wife of his bosom; so that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat," Deut. xxviii. 15, &c.

These are but part of the execrations which the infractors of the covenant were to draw upon themselves. And to convince them that they must determine, either not to contract the covenant, or subject themselves to all its execrations, God caused it to be ratified by the awful ceremony, which is recorded in the chapter immediately preceding the quotations I have made. He commanded one part of the Levites to ascend mount Ebal, and pronounce the curses, and all the people to say, Amen. By virtue of this command, the Levites said, "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother; and all the people said, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, the fatherless, and widow; and all the people said, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly; and all the people said, Amen. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them; and all the people said, Amen;" Deut. xxvii. 16—26.

The words which we render, *that thou shouldest enter into covenant*, have a peculiar energy in the original, and signify, *that thou shouldest pass into covenant*. The interpreters of whom I speak, think they refer to a ceremony formerly practised, in contracting covenants, of which we have spoken on other occasions. On immolating the victims, they divided the flesh into two parts, placing the one opposite to the other. The contracting parties passed in the open space between the two; thereby testifying their consent to be slaughtered as those victims, if they did not religiously confirm the covenant contracted in so mysterious a manner.

The sacred writings afford examples of this custom. In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, Abraham, by the divine command, took a heifer of three years old, and a ram of the same age, and dividing them in the midst, he placed the parts opposite each other: and *behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between those pieces*. This was a symbol that the Lord entered into an engagement with the patriarch, according to the existing custom! hence it is said, that *the Lord made a covenant with Abraham*.

In the thirty-fourth chapter of the prophecies of Jeremiah, we find a correspondent passage. *I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant, that they made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts, the princes of Judah,—I will even give them into the hands of their enemies*. If we do not find the whole of these cere-

monies observed, when God contracted the covenant on Sinai, we should mark what occurs in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus: *Moses sent the young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons: and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar; and the other half he sprinkled on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said, will we do, and be obedient.* What is the import of this ceremony, if it is not the same which is expressed in my text, that the Israelites, in contracting the covenant with God, enter into the execration-oath; subjecting themselves, if ever they should presume deliberately to violate the stipulations, to be treated as the victims immolated on Sinai, and as those which Moses probably offered, when it was renewed, on the confines of Palestine.

Perhaps one of my hearers may say to himself, that the terrific circumstances of this ceremony regarded the Israelites alone, whom God addressed in lightnings and thunders from the top of Sinai. What! was there then no victim immolated, when God contracted his covenant with us? Does not St. Paul expressly say, that *without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins*? Heb. ix. 22. And what were the lightnings, what were the thunders of Sinai? What were all the execrations, and all the curses of the law? They were the just punishments every sin

ner shall suffer, who neglects an entrance into favor with God. Now, these lightnings, these thunders, these execrations, these curses, did they not all unite against the slaughtered victim, when God contracted his covenant with us ;—I would say, against the head of Jesus Christ ? O my God ! what revolting sentiments did not such complicated calamities excite in the soul of the Saviour ! The idea alone, when presented to his mind, a little before his death, constrained him to say, *Now is my soul troubled*, John xii. 27. And on approaching the hour ; *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*, Matt. xxvi. 38, 39. And on the cross ; *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me !* Matt. xxvii. 46.—Sinner ! here is the victim immolated on contracting thy covenant with God ! Here are the sufferings thou didst subject thyself to endure, if ever thou shouldest perfidiously violate it ! Thou hast entered, thou hast passed into covenant, and into the oath or execration which God has required.

### *Application.*

My brethren, no man should presume to disguise the nature of his engagements, and the high characters of the gospel. Because, on the solemn festival-day, when we appear in the presence of the Lord our God ;—when we enter into covenant with him ; and after the engagement, when we come to ratify it in the holy sacrament ;—we not only enter, but we also pass into covenant, according to the idea



attached to the term : we pass between the parts of the victim divided in sacrifice : we pass between the body and blood of Christ divided from each other to represent the Saviour's death. We then say, " Lord ! I consent, if I should violate the stipulations " of thy covenant, and if after the violation I do " not recover by repentance, I consent, that thou " shouldest treat me as thou hast treated thy own " Son, in the garden of Gethsemane, and on Calvary. " Lord ! I consent that thou shouldest shoot at me " all the thunderbolts and arrows which were shot " against him. I agree that thou shouldest unite " against me all the calamities which were united " against him. And, as it implies a contradiction, " that so weak a mortal as I, should sustain so tremendous a punishment, I agree, that the duration " of my punishment should compensate for the defects of its degree ; that I should suffer eternally " in the abyss of hell, the punishments I could not " have borne in the limited duration of time."

Do not take this proposition for an hyperbole, or a rhetorical figure. To enter into covenant with God, is to accept the gospel precisely as it was delivered by Jesus Christ, and to submit to all its stipulations. This gospel expressly declares, that *fornicators, that liars, that drunkards, and the covetous, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* On accepting the gospel, we accept this clause. Therefore, on accepting the gospel, we submit to be excluded the kingdom of God, if we are either drunkards, or liars, or covetous, or fornicators ; and if after the commission of any of these crimes, we do not recover by



repentance. And what is submission to this clause, if it is not to enter into the execration of oath, which God requires of us, on the ratification of his covenant?

Ah! my brethren, woe unto us should we pronounce against ourselves so dreadful an oath, without taking the precautions suggested by the gospel to avert these awful consequences. Ah! my brethren, if we are not sincerely resolved to be faithful to God, let us make a solemn vow before we leave this temple, never to communicate, never to approach the Lord's table.

What! never approach his table! never communicate! Disdain to enter into the covenant which God does not disdain to make with sinners! What a decision! Great God, what an awful decision! And should this be the effect of my discourse! Alas! my brethren, without this covenant, without this table, without this oath, we are utterly lost! It is true, we shall not be punished as violators of vows we never made: but we shall be punished as madmen; who, being actually in the abyss of perdition, reject the Redeemer, whose hand is extended to draw us thence. Let us seek that hand, let us enter into this covenant with God.

The engagements, without which the covenant cannot be confirmed, have, I grant, something awfully solemn. The oath, the oath of execration which God tenders, is, I further allow, very intimidating. But what constitutes the fear, constitutes also the delight and consolation. For what end does God require these engagements? For what end does

he require this oath? Because it is his pleasure, that we should unite ourselves to him in the same close, constant and indissoluble manner, as he unites himself to us.

Let us be sincere, and he will give us power to be faithful. Let us ask his aid, and he will not withhold the grace destined to lead us to this noble end. Let us say to him, "Lord, I do enter into this oath of execration; but I do it with trembling. Establish my wavering soul; confirm my feeble knees; give me the victory; make me more than conqueror in all the conflicts, by which the enemy of my salvation comes to separate me from thee. Pardon all the faults into which I may be drawn by human frailty. Grant, if they should suspend the sentiments of fidelity I vow to thee, that they may never be able to eradicate them." These are the prayers which God loves, these are the prayers which he hears. May he grant us to experience them! Amen.

# SERMON IX.

*The Seal of the Covenant.*

*(For the Day of Pentecost.)*



2 COR. i. 21, 22.

*He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God : who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

**H**OW distinguished soever this sabbath may be, it affords a humiliating consideration to us. How glorious soever the event might be to the church, whose anniversary we now celebrate, it cannot be recollected, without deploring the difference between what God once achieved for his saints, and what he is doing at the present period. In the first Pentecost, the heavens visibly opened to the brethren, but our weak eyes are unable to pierce the vaults of this church. The Holy Spirit then miraculously descended with inspiration on those holy men, who were designated to carry the light of the gospel throughout the world ; but now, it is solely by the efforts of meditation and study, that your preachers communicate knowledge and exhortation. The earth shook ; the most abstruse mysteries were explained ; languages the least intelligible became instantaneously familiar ; the dead were raised to life ; Ana-

nias and Sapphira expired at the apostle's feet ; and such a multitude of prodigies were then achieved, in order to give weight to the ministry of the first preachers of the gospel, that no one among us can be unacquainted with those extraordinary events. But good wishes, prayers, entreaties, are all we can now exert to insinuate into your hearts, and conciliate your attention.

What then ! is the Holy Spirit, who once descended with so much lustre on the primitive Christians, refused to us ? What then ! shall we have no participation in the glory of that day ; shall we talk of the prodigies seen by the infant church, solely to excite regret at the darkness of the dispensation, in which it has pleased God to give us birth. Away with the thought ! The change is only in the exterior aspect, not in the basis and substance of Christianity : whatever essential endowments the Holy Spirit once communicated to the primitive Christians, he now communicates to us. Hear the words we have read, *He which stablisheth you with us, in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God ; who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.* On these operations of the Holy Spirit in the heart, we now purpose to treat, and on which we shall make three kinds of observations.

I. It is designed to develope the manner in which this operation is expressed in the words of my text.

II. To explain its nature, and prove its reality.

III. To trace the disposition of the man who retards, and the man who furthers the operations of the Holy Spirit.

This comprises the outlines of our discourse.

I. We shall easily comprehend the manner in which St. Paul expresses the operation of the Holy Spirit, if we follow the subsequent rules.

1. Let us reduce the metaphor to its genuine import. St. Paul wished to prove the truth and certainty of the promises God had given the church by his ministry: *All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen*, 2 Cor. i. 20. These are Hebrew modes of speech. The Jews say, in order to express the deceit of words, that there are men with whom yes is no, and no is yes; on the contrary, the yea of a good man is yea, and nay is nay. Hence the maxim of a celebrated Rabbin, "Let the disciples of the wise give and receive in fidelity and truth, saying, yea, yea; nay, nay." And it was in allusion to this mode of speech, that our Saviour said to his disciples, *Let your yea be yea, and nay be nay; whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil*, Matt. v. 37.

St. Paul, to prove that the promises God has given us in his word, are yea and amen; that is, sure and certain, says, he has established them in a three-fold manner; by the *anointing*, the *seal*, and the *earnest*. These several terms express the same idea, and mark the diversified operations of the Holy Spirit, for the confirmation of the evangelical promises. However, if another will assert, that we are to understand different operations by these three terms, I will not controvert his opinion. By the *unction*, may be understood, the miraculous endowment afforded to the apostles, and to a vast number



of the primitive Christians, and the inferences enlightened men would consequently draw in favour of Christianity. It is a metaphor taken from the oil poured by the special command of God, on the head of persons selected for grand achievements, and particularly on the head of kings and priests. It implied that God had designated those men for distinguished offices, and communicated to them the necessary endowments for the adequate discharge of their duty. Under this idea, St. John represents the gift of the Holy Spirit, granted to the whole church: *Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*, 1 John, ii. 20.

By the *seal*, of which the apostle here says, *God hath sealed us*, the sacraments may be understood. The metaphor is derived from the usages of society in affixing seals to covenants and treaties. Under this design are the sacraments represented in the Scriptures. The term is found applied to those exterior institutions in the fourth chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans. It is there said, that *Abraham received the sign of circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness of faith*. By the institution of this sign, to Abraham and his posterity, God distinguished the Jews from every nation of the earth; marked them as his own, and blessed them with the fruits of evangelical justification. This is its true import, provided the interior grace be associated with the exterior sign; I would say, sanctification, or the image of God; purity being inculcated on us in the Scriptures by the symbol of a seal. This, in our opinion, is the import of that fine passage, so

distorted by the schoolmen ; *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his : let every one that nameth (or invoceth) the name of Christ depart from iniquity, 2 Tim. ii. 19.* What is God's seal ? How does God know his own ? Is it by the exterior badges of sacraments ? Is it by *the circumcision which is in the flesh* ? No, it is by this more hallowed test, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

In fine, by the *EARNEST of the Spirit*, we understand those foretastes of heaven which God communicates to some of those he has designated to celestial happiness. An earnest is a deposit of part of the purchase-money for a bargain. St. Paul says, and in the sense attached to the term, *We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burthened : not that we would be unclothed, but clothed, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God ; who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit, 2 Cor. v. 4, 5.*

Whether, therefore, each of these terms, *unction, seal, earnest*, express the same thing ; and I think it could be proved, by several texts of Scripture, in which they are promiscuously used ;—or, whether they convey three distinct ideas ;—they all indicate that God confirms to us the evangelical promises in the way we have described.

This is the idea, my brethren, we should attach to the metaphors in our text. In order to comprehend the Scriptures, you should always recollect, that they abound with these forms of speech. The sa-

cred writers lived in a warm climate ; whose inhabitants had a natural vivacity of imagination, very different from us who reside in a colder region, and under a cloudy sky ; who have consequently a peculiar gravity, and dulness of temperature. Seldom, therefore, did the men of whom we have been speaking, employ the simple style. They borrowed bold figures ; they magnified objects ; they delighted in amplitude and hyperbole. The Holy Spirit, employing the pen of the sacred authors, did not change, but sanctify their temperature. It was his pleasure that they should speak in the language used in their own time ; and avail themselves of those forms of speech, without which they would neither have been heard nor understood.

2. Let us reduce the metaphor to precision, and the figure to truth. But, under a notion of reducing it to truth, let us not enfeeble its force ; and, while we would reject imaginary mysteries, let us not destroy those which are real. This second caution is requisite, in order to supercede the false glosses which have been attached to the text. Two of these we ought particularly to reject ;—the one on the word *Spirit* ;—the other on the words, *seal*, *unction*, and *earnest*, which we have endeavoured to explain.

Some divines have asserted, that the word *Spirit*, ought to be arranged in the class of metaphors designed to express, not a person of the Godhead, but an action of Providence ; and that we should attach this sense to the term, not only in this text, but also in all those we adduce to prove, that there is a di-

vine person distinct from the Father and the Son, called the Holy Spirit.

We have frequently, in this pulpit, avowed our ignorance concerning the nature of the divine essence, if I may be allowed the expression. We have often declared, that we can determine nothing concerning God, except what we are obliged to know from the works he has created, and from the truths he has revealed. We have more than once acknowledged, that even those truths, which we trace from reason and revelation, are as yet very imperfect ; and that the design of the Scriptures, when speaking of God, is less to reveal what he is, than the relation in which he stands to us. Hence I conceive, that the utmost moderation, and deference of judgment ; and, if I may so speak, the utmost pyrrhonism, on this subject, is all that reasonable men can expect from the philosopher, and the divine.

When we find in the Scriptures, certain ideas of the Godhead ;—ideas, which have not the slightest dissonance to those afforded by his works ;—ideas, moreover, clearly expressed, and repeated in a variety of places, we admit them without hesitation, and condemn those, who, by a false notion concerning propriety of thought, and precision of argument, refuse their assent. Now, it seems to me, that they fall into this mistake, who refuse to acknowledge, in the texts we adduce, a declaration of a Divine Person.

I shall cite one single passage only from the sixteenth chapter of the gospel by St. John ; *When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth ; for he shall not speak of himself ; but*



*whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak : and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me ; for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you.* I ask here, whether this propriety of thought, and precision of argument, of which the persons we attack make a profession, I had almost said a parade, obstruct their perception of three persons in the words we have read ? If so, can it obstruct their perceiving the Father, to whom all things belong ; the Son, who participates in all things which belong to the Father : the Holy Spirit, who receives those things, and reveals them to the church ? I ask again, whether this propriety of thought, and precision of argument, can understand an action of Providence, by what is ascribed to the Holy Spirit ? And whether, without offering violence to the laws of language, they can substitute for the term *spirit*, the words *action* and *providence*, and thus paraphrase the whole passage ; “ I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when this action of Providence is come, even this action of Providence, it will guide you into all the truth ; for it shall not speak of itself ; but whatsoever it shall hear, that shall it speak : for it shall receive of mine, and shall show them unto you.” We frankly confess, my brethren, nothing but the reluctance we have to submit our notions to the decision of Supreme Wisdom can excite an apprehension, that a distinct person is not set forth in the words we have cited. And, when it is once admitted, that the Holy Spirit sent to the church is a divine person, can they, on comparing the words of our text with those we have quoted, re-



sist the conviction, that the same Spirit is intended in both these passages?

In the class of those, who, under a pretext of not admitting imaginary mysteries, reject such as are real we arrange those divines, who deny the agency of this adorable person on the heart, in what the apostle calls *unction*, *seal*, and *earnest*: those supralapsarian teachers, who suppose, that all the operation of the Holy Spirit on the regenerate, consists in enabling them to preach; that he does not afford them the slightest interior aid, to surmount those difficulties which naturally obstruct a compliance with the grand design of preaching. The Scriptures assert, in so many places, the inefficacy of preaching without those aids, that no doubt can, in my opinion, be admissable upon the subject. But if some divines have degraded this branch of Christian theology, by an incautious defence, to them the blame attaches, and not to those who have established it upon solid proof. Those divines, who, by a mode of teaching much more calculated to confound, than defend, orthodox opinions, have spoken of the unction of the Spirit, as though it annihilated the powers of nature, and as though they made a jest;—yes, a jest, of the exhortations, promises, and threatenings addressed to us in the Scriptures:—Those divines, if there are such, shall give an account to God for the discord they have occasioned in the church, and even for the heresies to which their mode of expounding the Scriptures has given birth.

You, however, brethren, embrace no doctrines but those explicitly revealed in the Scriptures;—you

who admit the agency of the Holy Spirit on the heart, unsolicitous to define its nature—You, who say with Jesus Christ, *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth*, John iii. 8.—You, who especially admit, that the more conscious we are of the want of grace, the more we should exert our natural gifts ; that, the more need we have of interior aids, the more we should profit by exterior assistance, by the books we have at hand, by the favourable circumstances in which we may be providentially placed, by the ministry which God has graciously established among us ! Fear not to follow those faithful guides, and to adopt precautions so wise ; under a pretext of reducing metaphors to precision, never enfeeble their force ; and, under a plea of not admitting imaginary mysteries, never reject the real. This was our second rule.

And here is the third. In addresses to society in general, what belongs to each should be distinguished. St. Paul here addressed the whole church : but the whole of its numerous members could not have been in the same situation. Hence, one of the greatest faults we commit in expounding the Scriptures, and especially in expounding texts which treat of the agency of the Spirit, is, the neglecting to distinguish what we had designed. This is one cause of the little fruit produced by sermons. We address a church, whose religious attainments are very unequal. Some are scarcely initiated into knowledge and virtue ; others approach perfection ; and some hold a middle rank between the two. We

address to this congregation certain general discourses, which cannot apply with equal force to all ; it belongs to each of our hearers, to examine how far each argument has reference to his case.

Applying now to the words of our text the general maxim we have laid down ; you will recollect the ideas we have attached to the terms used by the apostle, to express the agency of the Holy Spirit on the heart. We have said that these terms, *unction*, *seal*, *earnest*, excite three ideas. And we can never understand those Scriptures, which speak of the operations of the Holy Spirit, unless those three effects of the divine agency are distinguished. Every Christian has not been confirmed by the Spirit of God in all those various ways. All have not received the threefold unction, the threefold seal, the thrêefold earnest. To some, the holy Spirit has confirmed the first, availing himself of their ministry for the achievement of miracles, or by causing them to feel that a religion, in favour of which so many prodigies had been achieved, could not be false. To others, the second confirmation was added to the first ; at the moment he carried conviction to the mind, he sanctified the heart. With regard to others, he communicated more ; not only persuading them that a religion, which promises celestial felicity, is true ; not only enabling to conform to the conditions on which this felicity is promised, but he also gave them foretastes here below.

II. and III. I could better explain my sentiments, did I dare engage in discussing the second part of my subject, to illustrate the nature, and prove the

reality of the Spirit's agency on the heart. But how can I attempt the discussion of so vast a subject in one discourse, when so many considerations restrict me to brevity? We shall, therefore, speak of the nature and reality of the Spirit's agency on the heart, so far only as this is necessary to furnish matter for our third head, on which we are now entering; and which is designed to trace the dispositions that favour, and such as retard, the operations of the Spirit: a most important discussion, which will develop the causes of the anniversary of Pentecost being unavailing in the church, and point out the dispositions for its worthy celebration.

What we shall advance on this subject, is founded on a maxim, to which I solicit your peculiar attention; namely, that every motion of the Spirit on the heart of good men, requires correspondent co-operation; without which his agency would be unavailing. The refusal to co-operate is called in Scripture, *quenching—grieving—resisting—and doing despite to the Spirit*. Now, according to the style of St. Paul, this quenching—grieving—resisting—and doing despite to the Holy Spirit, is to render his operation unavailing.

Adequately to comprehend this maxim, and at the same time to avoid a mistaken theology, and a corrupt morality, concerning the agency of the Spirit, make the following reflection: that the Holy Spirit may perhaps be considered in one of these three respects; either as the omnipotent God; or as a wise lawgiver; or as a wise lawgiver and the omnipotent God, in the same character. Hence the man on



whom he works, may perhaps be considered, either as a physical, or a moral being ; or as a being in whom both these qualities associate. To consider the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration as the omnipotent God, and the man for whose conversion he exerts his agency, as a being purely physical : and to affirm that the Holy Spirit acts solely by irresistible influence, man being simply passive, is, in our opinion, a morality extremely corrupt. To consider the Holy Spirit simply as a lawgiver, and man merely as a moral being, capable of vice and virtue ; and to affirm, that the Holy Spirit only proposes his precepts, and that man obeys them, unassisted by the divine energy attendant on their promulgation, is to propagate a theology equally erroneous. But, to consider the Holy Spirit as the omnipotent God, and legislator in the same character, and man as a being both moral and physical, is to harmonize the laws moral and divine, and to avoid, on a subject so exceedingly controverted, the two equally dangerous rocks, against which so many divines have cast themselves away.

The adoption of this last system, (which is here the wisest choice,) implies an acknowledgment, that there are dispositions in man which retard, and dispositions which cherish, the successful agency of God on the heart. What are these ? They regard the three ways, in which we said the Holy Spirit confirms to the soul the promises of *immortality and life*. These he confirms, first, by the persuasion he affords, concerning the truth of the gospel ; causing it to spring up in the heart on review of the miracles performed



by the first Christians. Secondly, he confirms them by the inward work of sanctification. Thirdly, he confirms them by foretastes of celestial delight, communicated to some Christians even here below. Each of these points we shall resume in its order.

First, the gift of miracles was a seal, which God affixed to the ministry of the first heralds of the gospel. Miracles are called seals: such is the import of those distinguished words of Christ; *Labour not for the meat that perisheth; but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you, for him hath the Father sealed*, John vi. 27. The seal which distinguished Jesus Christ, was the gift of miracles he had received of God, to demonstrate the divine authority of his mission: so he himself affirmed to the multitudes: *The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness that the Father hath sent me*, John v. 36.

The inference, with regard to the Lord, is of equal force with regard to the disciples. The miraculous endowments, granted to them, sanctioned their mission; as the mission of the master was sanctioned by the miraculous powers with which it was accompanied. What seal more august could have been affixed to it? What demonstrations more conclusive can we ask of a religion which announces them to us, than all these miracles which God performed for its confirmation? Could the Diety have communicated his omnipotence to impostors? Could he even have wished to lead mankind into mistake?

Could he have allowed heaven and earth, the sea and land to be shaken for the sanction of lies?

As there are dispositions which retard the agency of the Spirit, who comes to impress the heart with truth, so there are others which favour and cherish his work. With regard to those which retard, I would not only include infidelity of heart, whose principle is malice; I would not only include here those eccentric men, who resist the most palpable proofs, and evident demonstrations, and think they have answered every argument by saying, "It is not true. I doubt, I deny."—Men that seem to have made a model of the Pharisees, who, when unable to deny the miracles of Christ, and to elude their force, ascribed them to the devil. This is a fault so notorious, as to supersede the necessity of argument. But I would also convince you Christians, that the neglect of studying the history of the miracles we celebrate to-day, is an awful source of subversion to the agency we are discussing. Correspond, by serious attention and profound recollection, to the efforts of the Holy Spirit in demonstrating the truth of your religion. On festivals of this kind, a Christian should recollect and digest, if I may so speak, the distinguished proofs which God gave of the truth of Christianity on the day, whose anniversary we now celebrate. He should say to himself;

"I wish to know, whether advantage be taken of my simplicity, or whether I am addressed as a rational being; when I am told, that the first heralds

of the gospel performed the miracles, attributed to their agency.

“ I wish to know, whether the miracles of the apostles have been narrated, (Acts ii.) and inquire whether those holy men have named the place, the time, the witnesses, and circumstances of the miracles: whether it be true that those miracles were performed in the most public places, amid the greatest concourses of people, in presence of Persians, of Medes, of Parthians, of Elamites, of dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea, in Cappadocia, in Lybia; among Cretes, Arabs, and Jews.

“ I wish to know, in what way these miracles were foretold; whether it be true, that these were the characteristics of evangelical preachers, which the prophets had traced so many ages before the evangelical period; and whether we may not give another interpretation to these distinguished predictions: *Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come*, Hag. ii. 5, 6. *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke*, Joel ii. 28—30.

“ I wish to know, how these miracles were received; whether it be true, that the multitudes, the myriads of proselytes, who had it in their power to investigate the authenticity of the facts, sacrificed their ease, their reputation, their fortune, their life,

and every comfort which martyrs and confessors have been accustomed to sacrifice : I wish to know, whether the primitive Christians made these sacrifices on embracing a religion chiefly founded on a belief of miracles.

“ I wish to know, in what way these miracles were opposed ; whether it be true, that there is this distinguished difference between the way in which these facts were attacked in the first centuries, and in the present. Whether it be true, that instead of saying, as our infidels assert, that these facts are fabulous, the Celsuses, the Porphyrys, the Zosimuses, who lived in the ages in which these facts were recent, took other methods to evade their force ; attributing them to the powers of magic, or confounding them with other pretended miracles.”

This is the study to which we should proceed : woe be to us if we regard it as a tedious task, and excuse ourselves on inconsiderable pretexts ! Is there any thing on earth, which should interest us more than those important truths, announced by the apostles ; and especially those magnificent promises, they have delivered in the name of God ? Mortal as we all are, merely appearing on the stage of life, most of us having already run the greater part of our course, called every moment to enter into the invisible world, destined there to destruction, or eternal existence ; is there a question more interesting than this ? “ Is it for destruction, or eternal existence, I am designated by my Maker ? Are the notions I entertain of immortality ; of pleasures for evermore at God’s right hand ; of fulness of joy around his



throne ; of intimate intercourse with the adorable Being ; of society with angels, with archangels, with cherubim and seraphims ; for ages, millions of ages, an eternity with the blessed God, are the notions I entertain, realities, or chimeras ?” No, my brethren, neither in a council of war, nor legislative assembly, nor philosophical society, never were questions more important discussed. A rational man should have nothing more at heart than their elucidation. Nothing whatever should afford him greater satisfaction, than when engaged in researches of this nature, he discovers some additional evidence of immortality ; and when he finds stated, with superior arguments, the demonstrations we have of the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the apostles, the anniversary of which we now celebrate.

2. If there are dispositions which retard, and cherish, the first agency of the Holy Spirit on the heart ; there are also dispositions which retard and cherish the second. The Holy Spirit, we have said in the second place, confirms to us the promises of the gospel, by communicating the grace of sanctification. What success can be expected from his gracious efforts to purify the heart, while you oppose the works ? Why have those gracious efforts hitherto produced with regard to most of you, so little effect ? Because you still oppose. Desirous to make you conscious of the worth of holiness, the Holy Spirit addresses you for that purpose in the most pointed sermons. In proportion as the preacher addresses the ear, the Holy Spirit inwardly addresses the heart, alarming it by that declaration, *The unclean shall not*



*inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 10. But you have opposed his gracious work ; you have abandoned the heart to irregular affection ; you have pursued objects calculated to inflame concupiscence, or enkindle it with additional vigour.

The Holy Spirit, desirous to humble the heart, exhibits the most mortifying portraits of your weakness, your ignorance, your dissipation, your indigence, your mortality and corruption—a train of humiliating considerations in which your own character may be recognized. But you have opposed his work ; you have swelled your mind with every idea calculated to give plausibility to the sophisms of vanity ; you have flattered yourselves with your birth, your titles, your dignities, your affected literature, and imaginary virtues. Improve this thought, my brethren, confess your follies ; yield to the operations of grace, which would reclaim you from the sins of the age, and make you partakers of the divine purity, in order to a participation of the Divine felicity. Practice those virtues which the apostles so strongly enforced in their sermons, which they so highly exemplified in their lives, and so powerfully pressed in their writings.

Above all, my brethren, let us follow the emotions of that virtue which is the true test, by which the Lord knoweth his own people ; I mean charity ; such are the words of Christ, which we cannot too attentively regard ; *This is my commandment that ye love one another*, John xv. 12. When I speak of charity, I would not only prompt you to share your superfluities with the indigent, and to do good offices

for your neighbours. But a man, who, when celebrating the anniversary of a day in which God's love was so abundantly shed upon the church, in which the Christians became united by ties so tender, feels reluctance to afford these slight marks of the love we describe ;—a man who, wrapt up in his own sufficiency, and in the ideas he forms of his own grandeur, sees nothing worthy of himself in the religion God has prescribed ; would, however, converse with his Maker, and receive his benefits, but who shuts his door against his neighbours, abandons them in their poverty, trouble and obscurity ;—such a man, far from being a Christian, has not even a notion of Christianity. At the moment he congratulates himself with being distinguished from the rest of mankind by the seal of God, he has only the seal of the devil,—inflexibility and pride.

On these days, I would, my brethren, require concerning charity, marks more noble, and tests more infallible, than alms and good offices : I would animate you with the laudable ambition of carrying charity as far as it was carried by Jesus Christ. To express myself in the language of Scripture, I would animate you to love your neighbor as Jesus Christ has loved you. In what way has Jesus Christ loved you ? What was the grand object of his love to man ? It was salvation. So also should the salvation of your neighbours be the object of your love. Be penetrated with the wretchedness of people *without hope, without God in the world*, Eph. ii. 12. Avail yourselves of the prosperity of your navigation and commerce, to send the gospel into districts, where crea-

tures made in the image of God, know not him that made them, but live in the grossest darkness of the pagan world.

Be likewise impressed with the wretchedness of those, who, amid the light of the gospel, have their eyes so veiled as to exclude its lustre. Employ for the great work of reformation, not gibbets and tortures, not fire and faggot, but persuasion, instruction, and every means best calculated for causing the truth to be known and esteemed.

Be touched with the miseries of people educated in our own communion, and who believe what we believe; but who, through the fear of man, through worldly-mindedness, and astonishing hardness of heart, are obstructed from following the light. Address to them the closest exhortations. Offer them a participation of your abundance. Endeavour to move them towards the interests of their children. Pray for them; pray for the peace of Jerusalem; pray that God would raise the ruins of our temples; that he would gather the many scattered flocks; pray him to re-invigorate the Christian blood in these veins, which seems destitute of heat and circulation. Pray him, my fellow-countrymen, that he would have pity on your country, in which one prejudice succeeds another. Be afflicted with the affliction of Joseph, be mindful of your native land.

3. We have said lastly, that the Holy Spirit confirms the promises of celestial felicity, by a communication of its foretastes here below to highly-favoured souls. On this subject, I seem suspended

between the fear of giving countenance to enthusiasm, and of suppressing one of the most consolatory truths of the Christian religion. It is, however, a fact, that there are highly-favoured souls, to whom the Holy Spirit confirms the promises of celestial happiness, by a communication of its foretastes here on earth.

By foretastes of celestial happiness, I mean the impression made on the mind of a Christian, of the sincerest piety, by this consolatory thought; "My soul is immortal: death, which seems to terminate, only changes the mode of my existence: my body also shall participate of eternal life; the dust shall be re-animated, and its scattered particles collected into a glorious form."

By foretastes of celestial happiness, I mean, the unshaken confidence a Christian feels, even when assailed with doubts,—when oppressed with deep affliction,—and surrounded with the veil of death, which conceals the objects of his hope: this assurance enables him to say, *I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*, 2 Tim. i. 12. *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God*, Job xix. 25, 26. *O God! though thou slay me, yet will I trust in thee. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*, Psa. xxiii. 4. *I have set the Lord always before me; because he is on my right hand, I shall not be moved*, Psa. xvi. 8.



By foretastes of celestial happiness, I mean, the delights of glorified saints in heaven, which some find while dwelling on earth: when, far from the multitude, secluded from care, and conversing with the blessed God, they can express themselves in these words, *My soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate upon thee in the night-watches*, Psa. lxiii. 5, 6. *Our conversation is in heaven*, Phil. iii. 20.

By foretastes of celestial happiness, I mean, the impatience which some of the faithful feel, to terminate a life of calamities and imperfections; and the satisfaction they receive every evening, on reflecting that another day of their pilgrimage is passed; that they are one step nearer to eternity. *In this tabernacle we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven*, 2 Cor. v. 2. *My desire is to depart, and to be with Christ*, Phil. i. 23. Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do his coursers proceed so slow? *When shall I come, and appear before God*, Psalms xl. 2.

My brethren, in what language have I been speaking? How few understand it? To how many does it seem an unknown tongue? But we have to blame ourselves alone if we are not anointed in this way, and sealed by the Holy Ghost; and if we do not participate in these foretastes of eternity, which are the genuine earnest of heaven. But ah! our taste is spoiled in the world. We have contracted the low habits of seeking happiness solely in the re-



creations of the age. Most, even of those who conform to the precepts of piety, do it by constraint. We obey God, merely because he is God. We feel not the unutterable sweetness in these appellations of Father, Friend, and Benefactor, under which he is revealed by religion. We do not conceive that his sole object, with regard to man, is to make him happy. But the world,—the world,—is the object which attracts the heart, and the heart of the best amongst us.

Let us then love the world, seeing it has pleased God to unite us to it by ties so tender. Let us endeavour to advance our families, to add a little lustre to our name, and some consistency to what is denominated, fortune. But O! after all, let us regard these things in their true light. Let us recollect that, upon earth, man can only have transient happiness. My fortune is not essential to my felicity; the lustre of my name is not essential to my felicity; the establishment of my family is not essential to my felicity: and, since none of these things are essential to my happiness, the great God, the Being supremely gracious, has, without the least violation of his goodness, left them in the uncertainty and vicissitude of all sublunary bliss. But my salvation, my salvation, is far above the vicissitudes of life. *The mountains shall depart, and the hills be moved; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, Isa. liv. 10. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall*

*vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished, Isa. li. 6.* May God indulge our hope, and crown it with success. Amen.



# SERMON X.

## *The Family of Jesus Christ.*



MATTHEW xii. 46—50.

*While he yet talked to the people, behold his mother, and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, behold, thy mother, and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

**H**E said unto his father and to his mother, *I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children*, Deut. xxxiii. 9. So Moses said of the tribe of Levi. Was it to reproach, or applaud? Following the first impression of this sentence, it contains undoubtedly a sharp rebuke, and a deep reproach. In what more unfavourable light could we view the Levites? What became of their natural affection, on disowning the persons to whom they were united by ties so tender,

or plunging their weapons in the breasts of those who gave them birth?

But raising the mind superior to flesh and blood, if you consider the words as connected with the occasion to which they refer, you will find an illustrious character of those ministers of the living God; and one of the finest panegyrics which mortals ever received.

Nature and religion, it is admitted, require us to love our neighbour, especially the members of our families, as ourselves; and if we may so speak, as our own substance. But if it be a duty to love our neighbour, it is not less admissible, that we ought to *love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.* In fact, we ought to love God alone. Further, our love to him ought to be the centre of every other love: when the latter is at variance with the former, God must have the preference; when we can no longer love father and mother, without ceasing to love God, our duty is determined; we must cease to love our parents, that our love may return to its centre. These were the dispositions of the Levites. Obedient children, affectionate brethren, they rendered to the persons to whom God had united them, every duty required by so close a connexion. But, when those persons revolted against God, when they paid supreme devotion *to an ox that eateth grass*, as the Psalmist says; when the Levites received this commandment from God, their Lawgiver and Supreme; *Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his bro-*



*ther ; and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour, Exod. xxxii. 27. Then the Levites knew neither brother, nor friend, nor kinsman. By this illustrious zeal they acquired the encomium, He said to his father and his mother, I have not seen them ; and to his brethren, and his children, I have not known them.*

My brethren, if we must break the closest ties with those who dissolve the bonds of union with God, we ought to form the most intimate connexion with those who are joined to him by the sincerest piety. The degree of attachment they have for God should proportion the degree of attachment we have for them. Of this disposition you have, in the words of my text, a model the most worthy of imitation. One apprized Jesus Christ, that his mother and brethren requested to speak with him. *Who is my mother ? And who are my brethren ?* replied he ; *And stretching forth his hand towards his disciples, he said, Behold my mother, and my brethren, for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

The nobility of this world, those men of whom the Holy Spirit somewhere says, *Men of high degree are a lie*, have by this consideration been accustomed to enhance the dignity of their descent. Titles, and dignities, say they, may be purchased with money, obtained by favour, or acquired by distinguished actions ; but real nobility cannot be bought, it is transmitted by an illustrious succession of ancestors, which monarchs are unable to confer. Christian ! obscure mortal ! offscouring of the world !

dust and ashes of the earth, whose father was an Amorite, and whose mother was a Hittite, the source of true nobility is opened to thee; it is thy exclusive prerogative, (and may the thought animate with holy ambition every one in this assembly!) it is thy exclusive prerogative to be admitted into the family of the blessed God. Take his moral perfections for thy model; and thou shalt have his glory for thy reward. To thee Jesus Christ will extend his hand; to thee he will say, here is my brother, and mother, and sister.

The Holy Spirit presents a double object in the words of my text.

I. The family of Jesus Christ according to the flesh.

II. The family of Jesus Christ according to the Spirit. *One said, thy mother, and thy brethren, desire to speak with thee.* Here is the family of Jesus Christ according to the flesh. *Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* Here is the family of Jesus Christ according to the Spirit. Both these objects must be kept in view.

I. The idea which our Divine Master has given us of this first family, will supersede our minuter efforts to trace its origin. It is obvious from what he has said, that our chief attention should be to develope the character of those who belong to his family, according to the Spirit, rather than to trace those who belong to him according to the flesh. Whatever therefore concerns this divine Saviour,

claims, though not equal, at least, some degree of attention. For we find in our researches concerning the family of Jesus Christ, according to the flesh, proofs of his being the true Messiah, and consequently information which contributes to the confirmation of our faith.

There is no difficulty in determining concerning the identity of the person, called in my text, the mother of Jesus. The expression ought to be literally understood; it designates that holy woman, whose happiness all ages must magnify, she, by peculiar privilege, being chosen of God to be *overshadowed by the Highest*, to bear in her sacred womb, and bring into the world, the Saviour of men. She is called Mary, she was of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. This is nearly all we know of her; and this is nearly all we ought to know, in order to recognise in our Jesus, one characteristic of the true Messiah, who, according to early predictions, was to descend of this tribe, and of this family.

It is true that Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, those execrable men, distinguished by their hatred of Christianity, have disputed even this: at least, they have defied us to prove it. They have insinuated, that there are so many contrarieties in the genealogies of St. Luke, and St. Matthew, concerning the ancestors of our Jesus, as to leave the pretensions of his descent from David, and Judah, uncertain. It is to be regretted, that the manner in which some divines, and divines of distinguished name, have replied to this objection, has, in fact, given it weight,

and seemed the last efforts of a desperate cause, rather than a satisfactory solution.

Is it a solution of this difficulty? is it a proof that Jesus descended from the family of David, as had been predicted, to say that the evangelists insert the genealogy of Joseph, and omit that of Mary, Jesus Christ being reputed the son of a carpenter, and having been probably adopted by him, was invested with all his rights, the genealogy of the reputed father, and the adopted son, being accounted the same, though of different extraction? Would not this have been the way to flatter a lie, not to establish a truth? Did the prophets merely say, that the Messiah was the reputed son of a man descended from David's line? Did they not say in a manner the most clear and explicit in the world, that he was lineally descended from that family?—Is it a solution of the difficulty, to say that Mary was heiress of her house, that the heiresses were obliged by the law, to marry in their own tribe; and that giving the genealogy of Joseph, was giving the genealogy of Mary, to whom he was betrothed? Is it not rather a supposition of the point in dispute? And what record have we left of Mary's family sufficiently authentic to prove it?

Is it a solution of the difficulty to say, that St. Matthew gives the genealogy of Christ, considered as a King, and St. Luke the genealogy of Christ, considered as a priest; that the one gives the genealogy of Mary, whom they pretend was of the tribe of Levi, which establishes the right of Christ to the High-priesthood; the other gives the genealogy of Joseph, descended from David's family, which es-



establishes his right to the kingdom? Is not this opposing the words of St. Paul with a bold front? *If perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not to be called after the order of Aaron.* For he of whom these things are spoken, pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar; for it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which Moses spake nothing concerning the priesthood . . . . after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of carnal commandments, but after the power of an endless life, Heb. vii. 11—16. These are the words of our apostle.

Without augmenting the catalogue of mistaken solutions of this difficulty, we shall attend to that which seems the only true one. It is this: St. Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus Christ, and he is so called in the second chapter, and forty-eighth verse, of St. Luke. And it is very important, that posterity should know the family of the illustrious personage; to whose superintendence Providence had committed the Messiah in early life.

St. Luke gives the genealogy of Mary, to identify that Jesus Christ had the essential characteristic of the Messiah, by his descent from David's family. It was also very important for posterity to know that he descended from David; that he had a right to the throne, not only as being the reputed son of one of his offspring, who could confer it by adoption; but also that being conceived by the Holy Ghost,



and having for his mother a woman descended from David, according to the flesh, he himself descended from him, as much as it is possible for a being to descend, introduced so supernaturally into the world.

According to what has been advanced, it may be objected, that there is no mention made of Mary in the latter genealogy, more than in the former, that both concern Joseph alone; that St. Luke, whom we presume to have given the genealogy of Mary, closes his catalogue with the name of Joseph, as well as St. Matthew, whom we allow to have given the genealogy of Mary's husband.

But this objection can strike those only, who are unacquainted with the method uniformly adopted by the Jews in giving the genealogy of married women. They substituted the name of the husband for that of the wife, considering a man's son-in-law as his own offspring. According to this usage, which I could support by numerous authorities; these words of St. Luke, *Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, which was the Son of Heli*: amount to this, *Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, which was the son-in-law of Heli*, having betrothed his daughter Mary. This is sufficient on the genealogy of Mary.

But who are those called by the evangelist, brethren of Christ? *One said unto him*, and these are the words of my text, *Behold thy mother, and thy brethren, stand without, desiring to speak with thee.*

The opinion which has had the fewest partizans, and fewer still it merits, (nor should we notice it

here, were it not to introduce a general remark, that there never was an opinion, how extravagant soever, but it found supporters among the learned,) the opinion, I say, is that of some of the ancients: they have ventured to affirm, that the persons called in my text, the brethren of Christ, were sons of the holy virgin, by a former husband. To name this opinion is sufficient for its refutation.

The conjecture of some critics, though less extravagant, is equally far from truth: they presume, that the brethren of Christ were sons of Joseph: a single remark will supersede this notion. Four persons are called the brethren of Christ, as appears from Matt. xiii. 54.; it is there said, that his acquaintance, the people of Nazareth, talked of him in this way: *Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?* This James is unquestionably the same who is called the *less*. Now it is indisputable that he was the son of Mary, who was living at our Saviour's death: she was sister to the holy virgin, and stood with her at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion. Hence, if James were the son of Joseph, he must have been betrothed to the holy virgin, while married to her sister, who was living when he contracted his second marriage, which is insupportable.

Let us, therefore, follow here the general course of interpreters. The name of brethren, is not always used in the strictest sense by the sacred authors. It is not peculiarly applied to those who

have the same father and the same mother: it frequently refers to the relatives less connected. In this sense we use it here. Mary, the wife of Cleophas, was sister to the holy virgin; and the term *sister* the evangelists apply in the closest sense. She had four sons, above named, and they are called the brethren of Christ, because they were his cousins german. She had two daughters, who, for the same reasons, are called his sisters. If this hypothesis be attended with some difficulties, this is not the place for their removal.

It was a most glorious consideration to the holy virgin, to James, to Judas, to Joses, to Simon, and to their sister, to be so nearly related to Jesus Christ in the flesh. How honourable to say, this man, whose sermons are so sublime,—this man, whose voice inverts the laws of nature,—this man, whom winds, seas, and elements obey,—is my brother, is my son! So the woman exclaimed, after hearing him so conclusively refute the artful interrogations of his enemies, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.* But how superior are the ties, which unite the family of Jesus Christ according to the Spirit, to those which unite them according to the flesh! So he said to the woman above named, *Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it*, Luke xi. 27, 28. In my text, when apprised that his most intimate relations, in the flesh, desired an audience, he acknowledged none to be of his family but the spiritually noble. *Behold thy mother, and thy brethren*, said one, *stand without, desiring to speak with thee. Who is my mo-*

*ther ? and who are my brethren ?* replied he, and he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, *behold my mother, and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* This we shall proceed to illustrate in the second part of our discourse.

II. Our Saviour did not, in these words, design to exclude from his spiritual family all those who belonged to his family in the flesh. Who can entertain any doubt but that the holy virgin, who belonged to the latter, did not also belong to the former ? Who ever carried to greater perfection than this holy woman, piety, humility, obedience to the divine precepts, and every other virtue which has distinguished saints of the highest order ?

The Scriptures afford also various examples of the love of Mary, the wife of Cleophas, to Jesus Christ. She followed him to Jerusalem when he went up to consummate the grand sacrifice, for which he came into the world ; she stood at the foot of the cross with the holy virgin, when he actually offered up himself ; she went to water his tomb with her tears, when apprized of his resurrection.

As to those whom the evangelist calls the brethren of Christ, I confess, that to him they were not equally devoted. St. John affirms expressly, that *his brethren did not believe in him*, John vii. 5. But whether we may take this assertion in a more extended sense than in the text : or whether St. John spake of the early period of our Saviour's ministry ; certain it is, that among the four persons, here called



the *brethren of Christ*, all of them had received the seeds of piety, and avowed his cause; as I could prove, if the limits of this discourse would permit.

If, therefore, Jesus Christ designated none as the members of his spiritual family, but those who were then recognised as his disciples, it was not intended to exclude his relatives according to the flesh, but to mark that the former then afforded more distinguished evidences of their faith and devotion to the will of his Father.

Neither was it our Saviour's design,—when he seemed to disown his brethren, and his mother, properly speaking,—to detach us from persons to whom we are united by consanguinity, and to supersede the duties required by those endearing connexions. By no means: those affectionate fathers, who have invariably sought the happiness of their children;—those children, who, animated with gratitude, after sharing the indulgence of a father during his vigour, become, when age has chilled his blood, and enfeebled his reason, the support of his declining years;—those brothers who afford example of union and concord,—are actuated by the religion of Jesus Christ. The laws of nature ought, in this view, to have a preference to the laws of grace. I would say, that, although religion may unite us more closely to a pious stranger, than to an impious father, I think it the duty of a child to bestow more care in cherishing a wicked father, than a deserving stranger.

What our Saviour would say in the text is, that though he had a family according to the flesh, he had also a preferable family according to the Spirit, and



that the members of his spiritual family are more closely united to him, than the members of his natural household. Of this spiritual family I proceed to speak. And I have further to say, my dear brethren, that I would associate you in this spiritual family, in the latter period of this discourse. Condescend to follow us in the few remarks we have yet to make. We will shew, 1. The nature, and 2. The strength of this family-connexion. 3. Its effects ; or to speak with more propriety, its wonders. 4. Its superior felicity. 5. The persons it includes.

1. The nature of this relation consists in sincere obedience to the will of God. *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* Here we have two extremes to avoid : the one is the forming of too severe an idea, the other of conceiving notions too relaxed, of this disposition of heart.

Do not, therefore, conceive too severe an idea of obedience. I do not mean, that devotion to the will of God can ever be carried too far. No : though you were ready, like Abraham, to immolate an only son ; though you had such exalted views of *the recompence of the reward*, that, like Moses, you would prefer the reproach of Christ to Egypt and its treasures ; though you had the fervor of Elijah, the piety of David, the zeal of Josiah, the affection of St. John, and the energy of St. Peter ; though you were all ready, like the cloud of witnesses mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews, to be stoned, to be slain, to endure cruel torments, to be killed with the sword, to wander about in sheep-skins, and in goat-skins, in

deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth, you would not exceed a due devotion to the will of God.

But though it is not possible to carry this disposition too far, it is, nevertheless, possible to exaggerate that degree which constitutes us members of the Saviour's spiritual family. He knows whereof we are made. Religion is not for angels, but for men ; and however holy men may be, their virtues always participate of the infirmities inseparable from human nature. Those disciples, towards whom Jesus Christ extended his hand, committed, during the early period of their piety, faults, and great faults too. They sometimes misconceived the object of their mission ; sometimes distrusted his promises ; they were sometimes slow of heart to believe the facts announced by the prophets ; they once slept when they ought to have sustained their Master in his agony ; they abandoned him to his executioners ; and one denied knowing him, even with an oath, and that he was his disciple. Virtue, even the most sincere and perfect, is liable to wide deviations, to total eclipses, and great faults :—hence, on this subject, you should avoid too severe a standard.

But you should equally avoid forming of it notions too relaxed. Do you claim kindred with the spiritual family of Jesus Christ ? Do you claim the same intimacy with the Saviour which a man has with his brother, his sister, and his mother ? Tremble then, while you hear these words of St. Paul, *What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? What communion hath light with darkness ? And what concord hath Christ with belial ?* 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

Tremble while you hear these words of Christ, *No man can serve two masters*, Matt. vi. 24. Or, to unfold to you a more detailed field of reflection, do you not exceedingly mistake concerning obedience to the will of God ?

The will of God not only requires negative virtues, which consist in abstaining from evil ; but positive virtues also, which consist not in a mere refraining from slander, but in reprehending the slanderer ;—not in a mere refusal to receive your neighbour's goods, but in a communication of your own ;—not only in abstaining from blasphemy against God, but also in blessing him at all times, and in having your mouth full of his praise.

The will of God not only requires of you popular virtues, as sincerity, fidelity, courage, and submission to the laws, are generally accounted ; it also requires those very virtues which are degraded by the world, and considered as a weakness ; such as forgiveness of injuries, and contempt of worldly pomp.

The will of God not only requires virtues correspondent to your temperature, as retirement, if you are naturally sullen and reserved ; abstinence from pleasure, if you are naturally pensive and dull ; patience, if you are naturally phlegmatic, heavy and indolent : it likewise requires virtues the most opposite to your temperature ; as purity, if you are inclined to concupiscence ; moderation, if you are of an angry disposition.

The will of God requires, not mutilated virtues, but a constellation of virtues approaching to perfec-

tion. It requires *whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, that you should think on these*, Phil. iv. 8. It requires you to add to *faith, virtue ; to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness ; and to brotherly-kindness, charity ;* 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

The will of God requires not an immaturity of virtue, checked in its growth ; it requires you to carry, or endeavor to carry, every virtue to the highest degree ; to have perfection for your end, and Jesus Christ for your pattern.

2. and 3. After having reviewed the nature, and consequently the excellency of this connexion, let us next consider its strength. What we shall say on this head, naturally turns our thoughts towards its prodigies and effects. The power of this connexion is so strong, that the members of this spiritual family are incomparably more closely united to one another, than the members of a carnal family. This is obvious in the words of my text. Our Saviour has borrowed figures from whatever was most endearing in civil society, and even from connexions of the most opposite nature, in order to elevate our ideas of the union which subsists between him and the members of his family ; and of the union they have one with another : *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* In this idea there is no exaggeration. Associate whatever is most endearing between



a brother and brother, between a brother and a sister; between a child and a parent; associate the whole of these different parts in one body; and imagine, if it be possible to conceive, an object still more closely united, than the different parts of this body; and your views will still be imperfect of the ties, which subsist between the members of Jesus Christ's spiritual family.

They have in common, first an union of design. In all their actions they individually have in view nothing but the glory of that Sovereign whom they serve with emulation; and to whom they are all unanimously devoted.

They have, secondly, an union of inclination. God is the centre of their love; and being thus united to him as the *third*, (if I may borrow an idea from the schoolmen,) they are united one to another.

Thirdly, they have an union of interest. They are all equally interested to see the government of the universe in the hands of their Sovereign. His happiness constitutes their felicity, and each equally aspires after communion with the blessed God.

They have, fourthly, an union coeval in its existence. Go back to the ages preceding the world, and you will see the members of this spiritual family united in the bosom of divine mercy;—even from the moment they were distinguished as the objects of his tenderest love, and most distinguished grace; even from the moment the victim was appointed to be immolated in sacrifice for their sins. Descend to the present period of the world: let us say more;—look forward to futurity, and you will find them ever



united, in the noble design of incessantly glorifying the Author of their existence and felicity.

Hence you see the prodigies produced by this connexion. You see what Jesus Christ has done for those who are united in devotion to his Father's will. His incarnation, his passion, his cross, his Spirit, his grace, his intercession, his kingdom,—nothing is accounted too precious for men, joined to him by those tender and endearing ties.

You see likewise, what the men united to Jesus Christ are qualified to do one for another: they are all of one heart and one soul, and are ever ready to make the mutual sacrifices of benevolence and love.

4. The ties which connect the members of Jesus Christ's family are not less happy than strong. Connexions merely human, however endearing, however delightful, are invariably accompanied with anguish. What anguish must attend a connexion cemented with vice! What painful sensations, even in the midst of a criminal course! What remorse on reflection and thought! What horror on viewing the consequences of unlawful pleasures! On saying to one's self the recollection of this intercourse will pierce me in a dying hour; this unhappy person, with whom I am now so closely connected, will be my tormentor for ever!

What anguish is attendant even on friendship the most innocent, when extended too far! Delightful connexions, formed on earth by congenial souls, cemented by the intercourse of mutual love, and crowned with prosperity:—delightful bonds which connect a father with a son, and a son with a father; a

wife with a husband, and a husband with a wife; what regret you produce, when death, the allotted period, or end of man, and of all human comforts,—what regret you cost,—when death compels us to dissolve these ties! Witness so many Josephs attending their fathers to the tomb, who had been the glory of their families. Witness so many Rachels *refusing to be comforted, because their children are not*, Matt. xi. 18. Witness so many Davids, who exclaim with excess of grief, *O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—would to God I had died for thee—O Absalom, my son, my son!!!* 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

But in the ties which connect the family of Jesus Christ, there is no mixture of anguish. This you may infer from what we have advanced; and your own reflections may supply the scanty limits in which we are obliged to comprise this point.

5. We shall lastly consider the persons, connected by the bonds of obedience to the will of God.

The family of Jesus Christ consists of a selection of all the excellent in heaven and in earth. So St. Paul has expressed himself. *Of whom the whole parentage*, or as the text may be read, *Of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named*, Eph. iii. 15. On earth, the family of Jesus is not distinguished by the greatness of its number: and, to the shame of the human kind, there is a father whose family is far more numerous than the Saviour's: this father is the devil. And who are the children of the devil? To this question Jesus Christ has given us a key. He said, when speaking to the Pharisees, *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your*

*father ye will do ; he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth ; he is a liar, and the father of it, John viii. 44.* These are the two characteristics of his children ; lying and murder.

1. Lying. If you betray the truth, if you employ your genius, your wit, your knowledge, to embarrass the truth, instead of employing them for the acquisition of self-knowledge, and a communication of the truth to others ; if we become your enemy when we tell you the truth, when we combat your prejudices, when we attack your errors, when we endeavour to irradiate your minds, and to take the lamp of revelation from beneath the bushel ; if this is your characteristic, recognize in yourselves this trait of your father, which is lying, for he is *the father of a lie* ; and take to yourselves this awful declaration, *Ye are of your father the devil.*

2. He is a murderer ; and to hate our neighbour is, according to the language of Scripture, to kill him ; for *he that hateth his brother*, as St. John has decided, *is a murderer*, John iii. 15. Yes, if you obstruct your neighbour's happiness ; if you are envious at his prosperity ; if you are irritated by his virtues ; if mortified by his reputation ; if you take delight in aggravating his real faults, and in the imputation of imaginary defects, recognize another trait of your father ; apply to yourselves this awful assertion, which so many may apply with propriety, *Ye are of your father the devil.*

It is nevertheless true, that how numerous soever the children of the devil may be on the earth, Jesus Christ has a family among men ; and it is composed

of those who believe, those whom a sincere faith has invested with the privilege of considering themselves, according to St. John, as members of the family of God : *To as many as received him, to them gave he power, which I would render right, prerogative, privilege, to become the sons of God.*

The branches of God's spiritual family are not always visible to the eyes of flesh, but they are to the eyes of the spirit ; they are not always objects of sense, but they are objects of faith, which assures us of the continued existence of a holy church. Sometimes the fury of persecution, which prevents us from perceiving them, drives them into deserts, and causes them to take refuge in dens and caves of the earth. Sometimes the prevalence of calumny paints their character in shades dark as hell, calls their moderation indolence, their meekness cowardice, their modesty meanness of mind, their firmness obstinacy, their hope a chimera, their zeal illusion and enthusiasm. Sometimes it is the veil of humility by which they conceal their virtues, and which causes them to be confounded with persons who have no virtue, and to be less esteemed than persons whose virtues are affected. *Their kingdom invariably is not of this world : Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be. We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God, John xviii. 36. 1 John iii. 2. Col. iii. 3.*

But though the members of this spiritual family are not always visible, the reality of their existence is not diminished. On their account the world exists. Their prayers stay the avenging arm of an an-



gry God, and save the guilty world from being crushed beneath the stroke : for their sakes he sometimes mitigates the calamities, with which human crimes oblige him to visit the nations. It is their entreaties which cause their God and Redeemer speedily to descend, and which hasten the happy day that is the object of their wishes, and subject of their prayers, *Come Lord Jesus—come quickly.*

And if the family of Jesus Christ is *named on earth*, it is more especially named in heaven. There it exists, there it shines in all its lustre. But who are the members of this family of Jesus Christ ? They are *the redeemed out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.* They are the ambassadors of the Gospel, who have *turned many to righteousness ; they shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as stars of the first magnitude.* They are martyrs, come up out of great tribulation, they are *clothed in white robes, which they have washed in the blood of the Lamb.* They are all saints, who, having fought under his banner, participate the laurels of his victory. They are angels who excel in strength, and obey his voice. They are winged cherubims, who fly at his command. They are seraphims burning with his love. They are the thousand millions which serve him, and ten thousand millions which stand before him. They are the *great multitude, whose voice is as the sound of many waters*, and whose obedience to God is crowned with glory ; but they cast their crowns before the throne, and cry continually, *Hallelujah—let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory unto him.*



Such is the spiritual family of Jesus Christ, and such is the Christian family. Many of its members lie scattered in different parts of the earth, but the part which is most numerous, excellent, and consummate in virtue, is in heaven. What a consolation! But language is too weak! What a consolation to the believer, against whom old age, infirmities, and sickness have pronounced the sentence of death! What a consolation to say, "My family is in heaven; a gulf separates me, but it is not like the gulf which separates the damned from the glorified spirits, of which Abraham said to the rich man, *between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.*" It is a gulf whose darkness is enlightened by faith, whose horrors are assuaged by hope;—it is a gulf through which we are cheered and animated by the voice of Christ;—a gulf, from which one final struggle shall instantly make us free.

Death is sometimes represented to me under an idea happily calculated to assuage its anguish. There is not one of you, who has attained maturity of age, but has frequently seen those persons snatched away by death, who constituted the greatest happiness of your life. This is inevitably the lot of those to whom God accords, the precious shall I say? or the sad privilege of running the race of life. They live, but they see those daily taken away, whose company attached them to life. I look on death as reuniting me to those persons, whose loss had occasioned me so many tears during my pilgrimage. I represent myself as arriving in heaven and seeing this friend running to meet me, to whom my soul was united as the

soul of David to Jonathan. I imagine myself as presented to those ancestors, whose memory is so revered, and whose example is so worthy of imitation. I represent those children as coming before me, whose death affected me with a bitter anguish which continued all my days: with those innocent creatures I see myself surrounded, whom God, to promote their happiness, resumed by an early death.

This idea of death, and of the felicity which follows, is extremely delightful; and I do most sincerely believe it; at least I have never yet met with a thought, which could dissuade me from thinking that the glorified saints shall enjoy, in heaven, the society of those with whom they have been so intimately connected on earth. But how real and pleasing soever this thought may be, it is, my dear brethren, far too contracted. Let us form more exalted notions of the happiness God has prepared for us. Our family is in heaven, but not exclusively composed of the small circle of friends of whom we have been deprived by death. Recollect what we have just said. Our family is composed of the redeemed *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*:—of the ambassadors of the Gospel, *who have turned many to righteousness, who shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever*;—of martyrs, *who came up out of great tribulation, who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. Our family is composed of those illustrious saints, who have fought under the banner of Christ, and they now sit down on his throne. Farther, our family is composed of those

*angels that excel in strength, and obey the voice of God* ;—of those cherubims which fly at his command. Our family is composed of those thousand, thousand millions, and ten thousand millions which stand before him, and cast their crowns before the throne of Him who conferred the dignity upon them crying continually, *Hallelujah, let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory unto him!* Jesus Christ is the first-born of this household; God, who is all and in all, is head of the whole: these are the beings to whom we are about to be united by death.

What a powerful consolation against the fear of death! What an abundant remuneration of delight, for the privation of persons, whose memory is so dear! O my friends, my children, and all of you, who have, during my abode on earth, been the objects of my tenderest and most ardent attachment;—you, who after having contributed to my happiness during life, come again and surround my dying bed, receive the final tests of an attachment, which should never be less suspected than in these last moments;—collect the tears, which the pain of parting induces me to shed;—see, in the anguish of my last farewell all that my heart has felt for you.

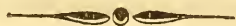
But do not detain me any longer upon earth; suffer me, at the moment when I feel my loss, to estimate my gain; allow me to fix my regards on those ever during connexions I am about to form;—on the angels who are going to convey my soul to the bosom of God;—on the innumerable multitudes of the blessed, among whom I am going to reside, and with whose voices I am going to join in everlasting praises

to my God and Saviour. Among the transports excited by objects so elating, if any wish yet remain, it is to see you speedily associated with me, in the same society, and participating the same felicity. May heaven hear my prayer! To God be honour and glory for ever. Amen.



## SERMON XI.

*St. Peter's Denial of his Master.*



MATT. xxvi. 69, &c. LUKE xxii. 61, &c.

*Now Peter sat without in the palace ; and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him them that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely, thou also art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter ; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

**I**T is laudable, my brethren, to form the noble design of not being moved by the presence of danger, and to cherish dignity of sentiment and thought,



This virtue distinguishes the heroes of our age, and it equally distinguishes the heroes of religion and piety. They defy the whole universe to shake their faith; amid the greatest dangers, they adopt this language of triumph: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us*, Rom. viii. 34—36.

But how laudable soever this disposition may be, it ought to be restricted; it degenerates into presumption, when carried to extremes. Many, not knowing how to proportion their strength to their courage, have fallen in the day of trial, and realized the wary maxim, *They that love the danger, shall perish by the danger*. This is exemplified in the person of St. Peter. His heart, glowing with attachment to his Master, every thing was promised from his zeal. Seeing Jesus on the waters, he solicited permission to walk like the Saviour; but feeling his feet sink beneath the surface of the unstable waters, he distrusted either the power or the fidelity of his Master; and unless supported by his compassionate arms, he had made shipwreck, to express myself with St. Paul, both of his faith and his life together. Seeing Jesus led away to the high-priest's house, he followed without hesitation, and resolved to follow even to the cross. Here, likewise, on seeing the angry Jews, the armed soldiers, and a thousand terrific appearances of death, he saved his life by a base denial; and, unless his forfeited faith had been restored

by a look from his Lord, the bonds of union had been totally dissolved.

In the examination of this history, we shall see first, the cowardice of an apostle, who yielded, for the moment, to the force of temptation. We shall see, secondly, Jesus Christ vanquishing the enemy of our salvation, and depriving him of his prey, by a single glance of his eyes. We shall see, lastly, a penitent recovering from his fall: and replying, by his tears, to the expressive looks of Jesus Christ:—three inexhaustible sources of reflection.

We shall consider, *first*, the fall of St. Peter; and it will appear deplorable, if we pay attention to the object which excited his fear, and to the circumstances with which it was connected.

The object which excited his fear, was martyrdom. Let us not magnify moral ideas. The fear of martyrdom is inseparable from human weakness. The most desperate diseases afford some fluctuating hopes of recovery, which diminish the fears of death. It is an awful thing for a man to see the period of his death precisely fixed, and within the distance of a day, an hour, a moment. And if it is awful to approach a death, obvious (so to speak) to our view, how much more awful, when that death is surrounded with tortures, with racks, with pincers, with caldrons of boiling oil, and all those instruments invented by superstitious zeal and ingenious malice. If, however, there were occasion to deplore the weakness of man, it is on account of the fears excited by the idea of martyrdom. Follow us then while we illustrate this assertion.

That men must die is one of the most certain and evident propositions ever advanced. Neither vice nor virtue, neither religion nor infidelity, nor any consideration, can dispense with this common lot of man. Were a system introduced of living for ever on the earth, we should undoubtedly become our own enemies, by immolating the hope of future felicity, for a life of such inquietude as that we should enjoy on the earth. And if there had been such a life, perhaps we should have been base enough to give it the preference of religious hope. If it had failed in securing the approbation of the mind, it would, at least, have interested the concupiscence of the heart. But, whatever is our opinion, die we must: this is an indisputable fact, and no one dares to controvert it.

Prudence, unable to avert the execution of the sentence, should be employed in disarming its terrors: destitute of all hope of escaping death, we ought to employ all our prudence in the choice of that kind of death, which is most supportable. And what is there in the severest sufferings of martyrs, which is not preferable to the death we expect from nature? If I consider death as an abdication of all I enjoy, and as an impenetrable veil, which conceals the objects of sense, I see nothing in the death of the martyr, that is not common to every other kind of death. To die on a bed, to die on a scaffold, is equally to leave the world; and the sole difference is, that the martyr finding nothing but troubles, gibbets, and crosses, in this life, detaches him-

self with less difficulty than the other, who dies surrounded by inviting objects.

If I consider death, with regard to the pains which precede and attend its approach, I confess it requires courage more than human, to be unmoved at the terrific apparatus exposed to the eyes of a martyr. But, if we except some peculiar cases, in which the tyrants have had the barbarity to prolong the lives of the sufferers, in order to extend their torments, there are few sudden deaths, which are not attended with less pain than natural death. There are few death-beds, which do not exhibit scenes more tragic than the scaffold. Pain is not more supportable, because it has symptoms less striking: nor are afflictions the less severe, because they are interior.

If I consider death, with regard to the just fear of fainting in the conflicts, in which I am about to be vanquished by the king of terrors, there are superabundant aids reserved for those who sacrifice their lives for religion. The greatest miracles have been achieved in favour of confessors and martyrs. St. Peter received some instances of the kind; but I will venture to affirm, that we have had more than he. It was on the verge of martyrdom, that an angel opened the doors of his prison. It was on the eve of martyrdom, that Paul and Silas felt the prison shake, and saw their chains broken asunder. It was in the midst of martyrdom, that Stephen saw the heavens open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. It was also in the midst of martyrdom, that *Barlaam* sung this psalm, *Blessed be the Lord, my*



*strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.*

If I consider death, with regard to the awful tribunal before which it cites me to appear, and with regard to the eternal books about to be opened, in which are registered so many vain thoughts, so many idle words, so many criminal courses, the weight of which is heavy on my conscience ; I see nothing still in the death of a martyr, that is not to be preferred to a natural death. It is allowed, that the exercise of repentance in dying circumstances, the prayers, the repeated vows, the submission to the will of God, who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death, are tests of our reconciliation to him. But these tests are often deceitful ! Experience but too frequently realizes what we have often said, that the dying take that for willing obedience, which is but constraint. A martyr has purer tests of his sincerity. A martyr might preserve his life, by the commission of a crime ; but rather than sin he devotes it in sacrifice.

Lastly, if I consider death, with regard to the futurity into which it will cause us to enter, I see nothing but what should excite in the martyr transports of joy. He has not only the promise of celestial happiness, but celestial happiness of the highest degree. It is to the martyr, that Jesus Christ calls from the highest abodes of heaven ; *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* Rev. iii. 21.



But the fall of St. Peter, though deplorable in itself, becomes still more so, by its concomitant circumstances. Let us review them.

It was, *first*, the simple charge of a servant maid, and of a few spectators standing by, which shook his courage. Had the apostle been cited before the sanhedrim ;—had he been legally called upon to give an account of his faith ;—had the cross, to which he promised to follow his Master, been prepared before his eyes ;—you would have said, that the magnitude of the danger striking his senses, had confounded his reason. But none of these objects were, in reality, presented. The judges, solely engaged in gratifying their fury against the Master, did not so much as think upon the servant. A maid spake, and her voice recalled the idea of the council, the death, and the cross, and filled his soul with horror at the thought.

*Secondly*, St. Peter was warned ; Jesus Christ had declared to him, in general, that *Satan had desired to sift him as wheat* ; and, in particular, that he would three times deny him that very night. A caution so salutary, ought to have induced him to redouble his vigilance ; to fortify the place he had discovered so weak ; and to avoid a danger, of the magnitude of which he had been apprised. When a man is surprised by an unforeseen temptation ; when he falls into a precipice, of which he was not aware, he is worthy of more compassion than blame. But here is a crime, known, revealed, and predicted.

The *third* circumstance is derived from the abundant knowledge, communicated to our apostle. Against the offence of our Saviour's humiliation, he

had been peculiarly fortified ; he had heard a voice from the excellent glory on the holy mountain ; he had been apprised more than any other disciple, that the sufferings of Christ were connected with the scheme of redemption.

The *fourth* circumstance is derived from the high office with which St. Peter was invested ; from the commission he had received from his Master, in common with the other members of the apostolic college *to go and preach the kingdom of heaven* ; and from this declaration, *Thou art Peter, upon this rock will I build my church*. This man, called to build up the church, gave it one of the severest injuries it could possibly have received. This man, called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, declared he knew him not. This man, constituted an established minister of his religion, became an apostate, and risked the drawing with him into the same gulf, the souls with whose salvation he had been entrusted. Some faults affect none but the offenders, but others have a general influence on all the church. And such, ministers of the living God, are our faults ! Our example is contagious, it diffuses a baneful poison on all those, over whom Providence has appointed us to watch.

The oaths he used to confirm his denial are a *fifth* circumstance. Not content with dissimulation, he denied. Not content with a threefold denial, he denied with an oath.

My brethren, do you understand in these provinces, all that is execrable in the crime of perjury ? I doubt it. A perjured man is one who takes the God

who bears the motto of *Faithful and true Witness*, to attest an assertion, of the falsehood of which he cannot be ignorant. A perjured person is one who defies the power of Almighty God : who says, in order to deceive, " Great God ! thou holdest thunderbolts in thy hand, launch them this moment at my head, if I do not speak as I think. Great God ! thou decidest the destiny of my immortal soul, plunge it in hell, if the sentiments of my heart are not conformable to the words of my tongue." Hence, when St. Peter disavowed his knowledge of Jesus Christ, it was saying in fact, " Yes, Great God ! if I know this man, of having connexion with whom I am now questioned, to be my Master ; if I have heard celestial voices, saying, *This is my beloved Son* ; if I have seen him transfigured on the holy mountain ; if I have heard his sermons ; if I have attested his miracles ; if that indeed be true, may I be the object of thy everlasting abhorrence and revenge."

The *sixth* circumstance is the period at which St. Peter disowned Jesus Christ. At the instant Jesus Christ displayed the tenderest marks of his love, St. Peter discovered the most cruel ingratitude. At the moment Jesus Christ was about to redeem St. Peter, this apostle disowned his Master. At the moment Jesus Christ was about to lay down his life for St. Peter, at the moment he was going to endure for him the death of the cross, this apostle refused to acknowledge him.

Ah ! human virtue ! how feeble thou art, whenever the breath of the Almighty, by which thou

art sustained, happens to be resumed! And if the Lots, the Moseses, the Davids, the Josiahs, and so many more;—if these pillars of the church have been shaken, what shall not this frail foundation be!—If these suns, irradiated *to shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*, have sustained eclipses, what shall not be done to the smoking flax! If the cedars of Lebanon have been almost rooted up, what shall not be done to the hyssop of the wall!

But let us no longer leave our apostle in the sad situation in which he has been considered. Among the difficulties opposed to the perseverance of the saints, the sins to which they are liable seems to be the strongest. Which side soever we embrace, we apparently fall into error. “Will he for ever precipitate in hell, the man for whom the availing sacrifice of the cross has already been presented? But also will he ever receive into paradise, a man contaminated with so foul a crime? Will he resume his grace after it is once given? But will he continue it with him, who renders himself unworthy?” Here Providence removes the difficulty which theology cannot solve. It extends to the fallen a gracious hand. That St. Peter the friend of Jesus Christ should be excluded from his grace, seems impossible. That St. Peter should ever be re-admitted to his favour seems not less inconceivable. Jesus Christ came to his aid, and enabled him to recover from his crime. Here is the solution of the difficulty. Then, adds our evangelist, Jesus Christ turned towards St. Peter, and looked attentively at him. This is the second part of my discourse.



II. My brethren, how expressive was that look ! How eloquent were those eyes ! Never was discourse so energetic ! Never did orator express himself with so much force ! Jesus looked on Peter.—It was the Man of griefs complaining of a new burthen, added to that, under the pressure of which he already groaned.—It was the compassionate Redeemer, pitying a soul about to destroy itself.—It was the Apostle of our salvation, preaching in bonds.—It was the subduer of the heart, the omnipotent God, repressing the efforts of the devil, and depriving him of his prey.

1. It was the Man of griefs complaining of a new burthen added to that, under the pressure of which he already groaned. We cannot doubt but the denial of St. Peter, augmented the passion of Jesus Christ. A wound is the more severely felt, in proportion as the inflicting hand is dear to us. We are not astonished to see an enemy turn his rage against us ; the case is common. But when we find perfidy, where we expected fidelity, and where we had cause to expect it ; and when it is a friend who betrays us, the anguish of the thought is difficult to sustain. So it was with Jesus Christ. That the Jewish populace were armed against him, was not surprising ; they knew him not. That the Pharisees should solicit his death is not astonishing ; he had exclaimed against their sins. That the Roman soldiers should join the Jews, is not surprising ; they considered him as the enemy of Cæsar. That the priests should accelerate his condemnation is no marvel ; they thought they were avenging Moses and the prophets. But that



St. Peter, who ought to have supported him in his anguish, should aggravate it ;—that he, who ought to have attested his innocence, should deny him ;—that he, who ought to have extended his hand to wipe away his tears, should, in some sort, lend his arm to assassins ;—it was this which pierced the Saviour's soul, and caused this reproachful glance of his eyes to St. Peter.

2. It was the compassionate Redeemer, pitying a soul about to destroy itself. One trait we cannot sufficiently admire, that during our Saviour's passion ; that amid the severest sufferings, he was less concerned for himself, than for the salvation of those for whom he suffered. Some days before his death, he was employed in supporting the disciples against the scandal of the cross. In the admirable prayer, addressed to the Father, he in some sort, forgot himself, and prayed solely for them. In the garden of Gethsemane, amid the most tremendous conflicts, which he sustained against the Father's justice, he interrupted the supplications for divine assistance, to go and exhort the disciples to watchfulness and prayer, and to arm them against the devil. On the cross, he prayed for his murderers ; and would have shed his blood with pleasure, could he have rejoiced over those who shed it, and obtained for them forgiveness and salvation.

More affected with the wound received by his disciple, than with what concerned himself, his soul dissolved in compassion : he seemed to say, " Simon, son of Jonas, I devote myself in sacrifice without reluctance, if it may obtain thy salvation. I submit,

with pleasure, to the justice of my Father, if thy restoration may be obtained. But when I see thee, at the moment of my death, withdrawing thyself from that mercy, whose treasures I have opened ; when I see thee *accounting the blood of the covenant*, I am going to shed, *an unholy thing* ; when I see that I die, and die in vain with regard to thee, if thou shouldest not recover from thy fall, my passion becomes the more severe, and the anguish of my death is redoubled."

This leads us to a third reflection. The look of Jesus Christ discovered an upbraiding aspect, by which the Saviour would reclaim the sinner. Hence, on casting his eyes upon him, he selected the circumstance of the crowing of the cock. The crowing of the cock, was as much the signal to realize the prediction of Jesus Christ, as to remind St. Peter of his promise ; and Jesus looked in that moment, that Peter might recollect his vows, oaths, and protestations ; he looked to claim his promise, or at least to confound him for his defect of fidelity.

But, however just these explanations may appear, they do not fully unfold the sense of the text. There is something miraculous in the history ; and the interpretations already given, offer nothing to the mind, but what might occur in a natural way. This look of Jesus Christ was, like the words of his mouth, *sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow*, Heb. iv. 12. When the disciples were going to Emmaus, they found an unction in the discourse of Jesus Christ, which induced them to say,

*Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures ?* Luke xxiv. 32. As if they had said, It is not necessary that our eyes should identify the person of Jesus Christ, to be assured he has appeared to us ; it is not necessary that we should associate the testimony of the woman, with the predictions of the prophets ; it is not necessary to investigate the removal of the stone, the emptiness of the sepulchre, and the folding of the linen, to ascertain his resurrection. We have arguments superior to these : the ascendancy he obtained over our minds, by the power of his word, and the fire which kindled our hearts, are proofs sufficient, that we have conversed with Jesus. Such, indeed, was this look. It was a flash of fire, irradiating the eyes of the apostle, which forcibly revealed the knowledge of himself ; it constrained him to give glory to God ; it dissipated all his terrors ; it calmed all his fears ; it raised his drooping courage ; it confirmed his feeble knees ; and re-animated his expiring zeal.

Hence you perceive the eloquence of the speaker, the intelligence of the hearer, the energy of the Saviour's look, and the sensibility of St. Peter's heart. By this single glance of the Saviour's eyes, inexpressible anguish was excited in his soul ; his recollection was restored, he came to himself, his heart expired, his countenance was appalled, a vapour arose in his eyes, which descended in a torrent of tears. Jesus Christ spake by his looks, St. Peter replied by contrition. This is the third part of my discourse.

III. My brethren, the recollection of sin causes grief of different kinds : three sorts of tears it particularly causes to be shed. Tears of despair, tears of torment, and tears of repentance. Tears of despair are shed on earth, tears of torment in hell, and tears of repentance in the church.

The anguish of despair is felt in this life. Such on some occasions, is the imbecility of the human mind, as neither to resist a temptation to sin, nor to endure the recollection of a former crime ; and the same base principle which induces a man to sin, frequently excites despair, on the recollection of its turpitude. Judas wept with despair ; he could not support the recollection of his crime ; he saw, he felt, he confessed its atrocity ; and having returned to the priests the thirty pieces of silver, the awful reward of his treason, he went out, and hanged himself.

The damned, on seeing the period of their repentance past, and the hour of vengeance come, shed in hell tears of despair. This is the *outer darkness, in which there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

But the faithful, while spared in the church, shed tears of repentance : of this sort were those of St. Peter.

You may *first* observe his anguish. He not only wept, but he wept bitterly. Forming imperfect notions of vice, as we mostly do, it is not surprising that we should think a repentance, superficial as ours, adequate to its expiation. But regarding it in a just light, considering the majesty of Him it insults, the awful cloud it interposes between God and us,



the alarming influence it has on the soul of our neighbor, and the painful uncertainty in which it places the conscience ; we cannot shed tears too bitter for the calamity of wilful transgression.

You may, *secondly*, remark the promptitude of the apostle's tears. *Then*, says the evangelist, that is, *as soon as Jesus Christ had looked on him*. The most laudable resolutions are doubtful, when they look solely at the future, and neglect to promote a present reform. In general, they are less the effects of piety, cherishing a desire to abandon vice, than the laxity of the flesh ; which, by hope of repentance after indulgence, would prevent remorse from interrupting the pleasures we expect from a vicious course. I fear every thing for a man, who, when exhorted to repent, replies, *to-morrow, at a future period*. I fear every thing for such a man ; I fear the winds ; I fear the waves ; I fear affliction ; I fear the fever ; I fear distraction ; I fear the habit ; I fear exhausting the treasures of patience and long-suffering. St. Peter deferred not to a precarious futurity, the care of his salvation. As soon as Jesus Christ had looked on him, he perceived it ; as soon as he called, he answered ; as soon as the hand was extended, he arose.

Observe, *thirdly*, the precaution attendant on his tears ; *he went out*. Not that he was ashamed to acknowledge his Master, in the place where he had denied him, but distrusting himself ; presumption having cost him too much, he made a wise use of his past temerity.



My brethren, would you know the true source of barrenness in your devotion ; would you find the cause of so many obliterated vows, so many sacred purposes vanished away, so many projects dispersed as smoke, so many oaths violated, you will find them in the defects of precaution. The sincere Christian fortifies that place in his heart, whose weakness sad experience has discovered ; he profits by his loss, and derives advantage from his relapse. He says, that object was fatal to my innocence ; I must no more look upon it ; that company drew me into this sin ; I must instantly withdraw ; it was in the court of Caiaphas I disowned my Saviour, I must shun that place.

*In fine*, adequately to comprehend the nature of St. Peter's repentance, we must discover all the effects a sight of his sin produced in his soul. Here I would have my hearers suspend the effects of fatigue ; they are incapable of attention, too far prolonged, though we discuss the most interesting truths of religion. I would, authorized by custom, add another text to that I have read. It occurs in the Gospel according to St. John. Jesus said to Peter, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee : He saith unto him, feed my lambs.* What has been said of lawful love,—that those whose hearts are united, never differ with the object of their affection, but it tends to augment the flame,—may be said of divine love. This is obvious from the text we have cited ; Jesus Christ and St. Peter alternately retaliated, for the eclipses their love had sustained.

It is true, the apostle replied only to part of the question of Jesus Christ. He was asked, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* On all other occasions, he would frankly have replied, *Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee more than these.* Ah, Lord! I well know the allusion of thy words; I fully perceive that thou wouldest humble me, by the recollection of the promise I have made, and which I have basely violated; *Though all men should be offended with thee, yet will I never be offended.* I am fully impressed with the mortifying history thou wouldest retrace. I am the least of all my brethren: there is not one to whom I can dare to give myself the preference.

If St. Peter replied with humility, he replied also with sincerity and zeal. If we wish the faithful to be humble, we never wish them to be vain. If we do not require them to say, "I am conscious of being so established in grace, as never to be shaken," we wish at least, that they should feel the cheering and reviving flame of divine love, when its embers are most concealed in the ashes. We wish them not to make an ostentatious display of piety, but to evidence the tender attachment they have for God; even when, through weakness, they have happened to offend him. This was the disposition of St. Peter, and his humility implied no defect of love. *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* "Lord! I can presume nothing of myself, the past makes me tremble for the future; the example of distinguished saints, and mine still more, humbles and abases my soul. Perhaps, like Job, I shall curse the day of my birth;

perhaps, like David, I shall become guilty of murder and treason; perhaps I shall deny thee again; perhaps, I shall be so vile, as to repeat these awful words, which will, to me, be a subject of everlasting regret, *I know not the man, I am not one of his disciples*; and if thou wilt condemn me, thou hast only to crush a worm, on whom no dependance can be placed. After all, Lord! amid so many defects, so many offences, I feel that I love thee still; I feel that strong temptations can never eradicate a love, which is graven on my heart; I feel, when thy perfections are discussed, that they affect, penetrate, and fill my soul; I feel delighted that my Redeemer is invested with such abundant glory and strength; when thy gospel is preached, I feel my heart burn within me; and I admire and adore the God, who has revealed a scheme of salvation so grand, noble, and sublime. I feel, notwithstanding this awful deviation, inconceivable sorrow, and inconceivable shame, which, to me, is an evident test, that the God I offend, is, in reality, the God I love."

Can it be imagined, that St. Peter's avowal of his weakness, rendered his love less estimable to his Master? Can it be conceived, that Jesus Christ is less delicate in his attachment than man? Knowing the fidelity of a friend, having a thousand satisfactory tests of his attachment, do you cease to love him, when he has committed a fault, for which he is wounded the first? *The Lord knoweth whereof we are made.* Our faults, howsoever glaring (if followed by repentance,) though they may suspend, for a period, the influence of his love, can neither change its na-

ture, nor restrict its duration. St. Peter had no sooner said to his Master, *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee*, than he was re-established in his ministry by this prompt reply, *Feed my sheep*.

O how worthily did this apostle repair the offence he had given the church, by his devotion to its interests! Methinks I see him gathering, on the day of Pentecost, the souls which, perhaps, he had caused to stray! Methinks I seem to hear those pathetic addresses proceed from his mouth, which, like streams of lightning, enkindle every thing in their course; softening those very souls, which the cross of Christ was unable to move; extorting from them this language, highly expressive of compunction, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* Methinks I see him flying from Pontus to Galatia, from Galatia to Bythia, from Bythia to Cappadocia, from Cappadocia to every province of Asia, from Asia to Rome, leaving all his course strewed with the wrecks of Satan's power; with trophies of temples demolished, of idols dethroned, of pagans converted, correspondent consequences of a ministry, which, at its first commencement, had converted eight thousand men. Methinks I see him led from tribunal to tribunal, sometimes before the Jews, and sometimes before the Romans, every where loaded with the reproach of Christ, every where confessing his name; finally fixed on a cross, and saying, as he died for the Redeemer, who had died for him, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*.

Such was the repentance of St. Peter, and such may ours now be! May those eyes which still seek



us, as they sought him, pierce our heart, as they pierced his; striking the conscience with sanctifying terror, and causing those tears of repentance to flow, which are so availing for the sinner.

They ought to produce those particular effects on you, my brethren, whose sin has had a sad conformity to St. Peter's; who having seen (while in France,) Jesus Christ delivered again into the hands of thieves, and hearing the interrogation, *You, also, are not you his disciples?* have answered as our apostle, *I know not the man, I am not one of his disciples.* Oh! seek the eyes of Jesus Christ: see the looks he gives, hear what they say: Cowardly souls, are these the fine promises you made in the time of peace? Is this the example you have set before the church? Was it not enough——? But why do I open wounds, which the mercy of God has closed? Why do I recal the recollection of a crime, which so many tears, so many torrents of blood, so many sacrifices, have effaced? It is, indeed, less with a view that I name it now, to reproach the fault, than to remind you of the vows you made, when, all bathed in tears, you implored forgiveness; less to overwhelm you with a sight of your sin, than to comfort you with that divine mercy, which has done it all away.

Who can ascertain the extent of mercy? Who can find language sufficiently strong, and figures sufficiently pure, noble, and sublime, for its adequate illustration? To what sinner did it ever prohibit access? What wounded and contrite conscience was ever repulsed at its bar? This immensity of mercy



has forgiven Nebuchadnezzar and Manasseh, the one a monster in nature, the other a monster in religion. It has forgiven St. Paul for persecution, and St. Peter for apostacy. It has forgiven you, who have imitated this weak disciple ; it has re-admitted you into the fellowship of the church, who had so basely abandoned it. Happy those apostate Protestants, if Jesus Christ should deign to cast his eyes upon them, as he has on you. Happy if, on quitting the court of Caiaphas, in which they have, like our apostle, denied their Master, they should weep like you.

O God ! if we are permitted to address thee, though but *dust and ashes*, is it for the confirmation, or the confusion of our faith, that on this subject, thou seemest inexorable ; and a subject on which we will never cease to pray. On this head, has the mighty God *forgotten to have compassion* ? No ! I cannot persuade myself that God has for ever abandoned so large a portion of his church. No ! I cannot persuade myself that God has ceased to watch over the consciences of those our unhappy brethren, whom satan has so long detained in security and slumber. No ! I cannot persuade myself that God should permit so many children to perish for the sins of their fathers ; and to be for ever separated from the church, to which they materially belong. Let our part be done, and God's shall surely be accomplished. Let us be afflicted for the affliction of Joseph. Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Let the calamities of the church be ever on our mind. They are ever before the eyes of God ; they excite him to jealousy ; they cause him to emerge from

that cloud, in which he has so long been concealed for the exclusion of our prayers.

*Application.*

I address myself to you, my brethren, whose characters have never been defiled with so foul a blot ; offer not incense to your drag, nor sacrifice to your net. Ascribe not to your courage, a felicity, which perhaps is solely due to the favourable circumstances in which you may have been providentially placed. Remember St. Peter. He reposed the utmost confidence in his zeal ; and, the first trial he made of his strength, he was convinced of his weakness. Had God smitten the Shepherd in the midst of you, perhaps the sheep would have been scattered. Had you, as so many others, seen gallies equipped, dungeons opened, gibbets erected, faggots kindled, executioners armed, racks prepared, perhaps you would likewise have denied the Saviour.

Do I impose on my hearers ? Do you judge by what we do in the time of peace, of what we should do in the time of tribulation ? Let each here sound the depth of his own heart, and let him support, if possible, the dignity of Jesus Christ. How frequently, amid a slanderous multitude, who have said to us, *Are not you his disciples ?* Are not you attached to those, who make it a point of conscience not to mention the faults of your neighbours ? How often have we replied, by a guilty silence, *I know him not, I am not one of his disciples.* How often in licentious company, when asked, “ Are not you of that class ?

Are not you one of those, who restrict their appetites, moderate their passions, and mortify the flesh?" How often have we answered, *I know him not, I am not one of his disciples*. How often when led away with the enemies of righteousness, who have said, "Are not you one of that company? Are not you one of those who pique themselves on primitive virtue?" How often have we answered by a cowardly conduct, *I know him not, I am not one of his disciples*.

In defiance of all the composure and apathy with which we daily commit this sort of sins, conscience sometimes awakes and enforces reformation. One of those happy occasions is just at hand. A crowded audience is expected here on Wednesday next. A trumpet is blown in Zion; a solemn assembly is convoked; a fast is proclaimed. But shall I tell you, my brethren, after excepting the small number who will then afflict their righteous soul, and, no doubt, redouble their devotion; after excepting the small number, and after examining the nature of our solemn humiliations, that I am less afraid of your sins, than of your fasts for national reform?

Before the great God;—before the Holy One of Israel, whose love of holiness is infinite as himself, we shall appear on Wednesday next, with minds still immersed in the cares, and agitated with the pleasures of the preceding day; we shall appear with dissipation, with a heart neither touched, nor broken, nor contrite; we shall each appear, and say, *I have sinned*; or in other words, "I have made my house a scene of voluptuousness, a seat of slander, a haunt of infamy: I have trampled my brethren under

my feet, and this opulence, with which God has invested me to support, I have employed to oppress, the wretched: I have amassed exorbitant gains on the right hand, and the left; I have sacrificed friend, pupil, widow, orphan; I have sacrificed every thing to my private interest, the only god I worship and adore." On this great God, who discovers the most latent foldings of the heart, whose *sword divides asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow*; in whose presence *all things*, the mind and heart, the secret thoughts, the concealed crimes, the dark designs, *all things are naked and manifest*:—on this great God we presume to impose by the exterior, by the tinsel of devotion, by covering ourselves with sackcloth and ashes, by bowing the neck to the yoke, and afflicting the soul for a single day; even, if we should put on sackcloth and ashes; if we should bow the neck to the yoke, and afflict the soul for a single day. But this very exterior, of which God says, *Is this the fast I have chosen? Callest thou this a fast, a day agreeable to the Lord?* Isaiah lviii. 5. This mere exterior is not even found among us: we have only to open our eyes to admit the propriety of the charge.

Before this great God, whose power is infinite, and who seems to have displayed it of late years, solely to punish the crimes of men, and to strike all Europe with terror and death, with horror and despair;—before this God we shall presume to ask, not to be involved in the general destruction; we shall presume to offer up this prayer, while each is resolved to insult him, to devour one another, to adhere



to our criminal connections, to persevere in our unlawful gains. Am I then extravagant in saying, that, when I reflect on the nature of our solemn humiliations, I am less afraid of our sins, than of the fasts we celebrate for national reform?

Not that this sort of fasts, are always unavailing ; the mercy of God sometimes gives them effect, and endeavours in some sort to overlook our hypocrisy. *When he slew them, then they sought him, and remembered that God was their rock. Nevertheless, they did flatter with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with him. But he being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and many a time turned away his anger, Psalm. lxxviii. 34—38.* God has not only acted on these principles with regard to his ancient people, but even with regard to us. On the approach of death, when we have sought the Lord by solemn prayer, *When we have remembered our rock, when we have flattered with our mouth, and lied with our tongues*, promising reformation, he has had compassion upon us, and has retarded our destruction. On that account we still live. On that account these hearers are still present in this temple, and the wicked among them have been precipitated into the gulf of Gehenna. But how long, think you, can this sort of fasts produce the effects for which they have hitherto availed? Weigh the words which follow the above quotation. *When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle in Shiloh, the tent he had planted among men.*



*And he delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand, verse 59, 60, 61.*

*Holland! Holland!* here is the sentence of thy destiny. God, after regarding our humiliations for a certain time, after *remembering that we are but flesh*, after enduring the prayers of deceitful tongues, and the promises of feigned lips, he will finally hear the cry of our sins, he will abhor Israel, he will abandon *his pavilion in Shiloh*, and this sacred temple in which he deigns to dwell with men.

My brethren, are we yet spared to sound the alarm, to thunder? And shall we not adopt a new mode of celebrating this fast, and endeavour to execute it?

And you, our senators and governors! who have appointed this solemnity, let us apprise you also of its appropriate duties. Come on Wednesday next: like modern Jehoshaphats, prostrate, at the footstool of God's throne, the dignities with which you are invested; and for which you must give so solemn an account. Come, and let all your glory consist in humiliation and repentance. Come, and surrender into his omnipotent hands, the reins of this republic, and swear that you will henceforth govern it by no maxims but his laws. And may God grant, may God indeed grant you, to set so laudable an example before his church; and, having inspired you with the noble resolution, may he crown it with effect?

Ministers of Jesus Christ, whom Providence calls on Wednesday next to administer the word, your task is obviously great. With what a charge are you entrusted! On you principally devolves the duty of alarming and abasing the wicked. On you princi-

pally devolves the duty of stopping the torrent of iniquity, which is followed by these awful calamities. On you principally devolves the duty of quenching the flames of celestial vengeance, enkindled against our sins. *Who is sufficient for those things?* But use your efforts, and expect the rest from the blessing of God. Speak as ministers ought to speak on like occasions. *Cry aloud, lift up your voice like a trumpet, show Jacob his transgressions, and Israel his sins.* If you testify the truth, what matter if they murmur against your discourses. And may God, on this solemn occasion, *teach our hands to war, and our fingers to fight.* May God inspire you with magnanimity of mind correspondent to the mission with which you are invested.

And you, Christian people, what will you do on Wednesday next? It is not only your presence in this temple;—it is not only hymns and prayers, supplications and tears, which we solicit,—a fast should be signalized by more distinguished marks of conversion and repentance: these are restitution, these are mutual reconciliation, these are a profusion of charities, these are a diligent search for the indigent, who are expiring as much through shame as want. Here, here, my dear brethren, is what we require. And let me obtain this request! Let me even expire in this pulpit, in endeavouring to add some degree of energy to your devotion, and effect to your fast! Our prayers shall supply our weakness. O Almighty God! O God! who makest *judgment thy strange work*, let our prayers appease thy indignation! Resist not a concourse of people, assembled to besiege the

throne of thy grace, and to move thy bowels of paternal compassion ! When our nobles, our pastors, our heads of houses, our children, when all our people, when all shall be assembled on Wednesday next in this house, with eyes bathed in tears, with hearts rent, for having offended so good and gracious a God,—when each shall cry from the ashes of our repentance, *Have mercy upon me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, and blot out my transgressions.* Deign thou also to be present, O great God, and *Holy One of Israel.* Deign thou also to be present with the goodness, the love, the bowels of compassion, which thou hast for poor penitent sinners ! Hear, O Lord, hear, O Lord, and pardon ! Amen.



## SERMON XII.

*On the Nature of the unpardonable Sin.*

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HEBREWS vi. 4, 5, 6.

*It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come ; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.*

**H**OW dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. On a different occasion, there would have been nothing surprising in the fears of Jacob. Had God revealed himself to this patriarch in the awful glory of avenging wrath, and surrounded with devouring fire, *with darkness and with tempest* ; it would not have been surprising that a man, that a sinner, and a believer of the earlier ages of the church, should have been vanquished at the sight. But, at a period, when God approached him with the tenderest marks of love ; when he erected a miraculous ladder between heaven and earth, causing the angels to ascend and descend for the protection of his servant ; when he addressed him in these consolatory words, *Behold I am with thee, I will keep thee in all places whither thou*



goest, and I will bring thee again into this land ; for I will not leave thee ; that Jacob should tremble in such a moment, is what we cannot conceive without astonishment. What ! is the gate of heaven dreadful ; and is the house of God an object calculated to strike terror into the mind ?

My brethren, Jacob's fear unquestionably proceeded from the presence of God, from the singularity of the vision, and the peculiar novelty of the discovery, which struck his imagination. But let us further extend our thoughts. Yes, the gate of heaven is terrible, and the house of God is dreadful ! and his favours should impress solemnity on the heart. Distinguished favours give occasion to distinguished crimes, and from places the most exalted have occurred the greatest falls. St. Paul, in the words of my text, places each of the Hebrews, whom he addressed, in the situation of Jacob. He exhibits a portrait of the prodigies achieved in their favour, since their conversion to Christianity ; the miracles which had struck their senses ; the knowledge which had irradiated their minds ; and the impressions which had been made on their hearts. He opens to them the gate of heaven ; but, at the same time, requires that they should exclaim, *How dreadful is this place !* From this profusion of grace, he draws motives for salutary fear. *It is impossible,* says he, *for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come ; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.*

St. Paul, after having pronounced these terrific words, adds; *Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you.* Happy apostle, who, while pronouncing the sentence of celestial vengeance, could flatter himself that it would not fall on any of his audience. But, my brethren, shall we say, *Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you?* The disposition is worthy of our wish. May it be the effect of this discourse, and the fruit of our ministry!

To have been enlightened—to have tasted the heavenly gift—to have been partakers of the Holy Ghost—to have tasted the good word of God, and felt the powers of the world to come—and to fall away in defiance of so much grace,—such are the odious traits employed by the apostle to degrade a crime, the nature of which we shall now define. The awful characteristics in the portrait, and the super-added conclusion, that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, fully apprize us, that he here speaks of the foulest of all offences; and, at the same time, gives us a limited notion of its nature.

Some have thought, that the surest way to obtain a just idea of the sin, was to represent it by every atrocious circumstance. They have collected all the characteristics, which could add aggravation to the crime; they have said, that a man who has known the truth, who has despised, hated, and opposed it, neither through fear of punishment, nor hope of reward, offered by tyrants to apostacy, but from a principle of malice, is the identical person of whom the apostle speaks; and that in this monstrous association of light, conviction, opposition, and uncon-

querable abhorrence of the truth, this awful crime consists.

Others, proceeding further, have searched ancient and modern history for persons, in whom those characteristics associate ; that, superadding example to description, they might exhibit a complete portrait of the sin, the nature of which we shall endeavour to define. In the course of this sermon, we shall endeavor to draw, from their method, whatever may most contribute to your instruction. But, first of all, we deem it our duty to make some previous observations, and to derive the light from its source. In the discussion of a sin, solitary in its nature, the Scriptures having excluded none from salvation, but those who are guilty of this offence, it is of the last importance to review all those passages, which, it is presumed, have reference to the crime : we must inquire in what they differ, and in what they agree, drawing from this association of light, that instruction, which cannot be derived from any other source.

The task will not exceed our limits, there being only four texts, in which, it is presumed, the Scriptures speak of this sin. We shall begin with the words of St. Matthew : *I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him ; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in that which is to come.* This text, which Augustine deems the most

difficult in the scriptures, will become intelligible, if we examine the occasion, and weigh the words.

The occasion is obvious to understand. Jesus had just cured a demoniac. The Pharisees had attested the fact, and could not deny its divine authority: their eyes decided in favour of Jesus Christ. But they had recourse to an extraordinary method of defaming his character. Unable to destroy the force of the miracle, they maintained that it proceeded from an impure source, and that it was by the power of the devil Jesus Christ healed this afflicted class of men. This was the occasion on which he pronounced the words we have recited.

The import of the expressions is equally easy to comprehend. Who is the *Son of man*? And who is the *Holy Ghost*? And what is it to speak against the one and the other? The Son of man is Jesus Christ revealed in human form. Without staying here to refute a mistake of the learned Grotius who pretends, because the article does not precede the word, it is not to be understood of our Saviour, but of men in general. To confirm the sense here attached to the term, we shall only observe, that St. Luke (chap. xii. 8.) after calling our Saviour *the Son of man*, immediately adds, *Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him*: where it evidently follows, that by *the Son of man*, Jesus Christ must be understood. And though the expression may elsewhere have other significations, they have no connection with our subject.

By the Holy Ghost, must be understood the third person in the adorable Trinity; considered not only



as God, but as Author of the miracles achieved for the confirmation of the gospel. Hence, to *speak against the Son of man*, was to outrage the Lord Jesus; to render his doctrine suspected; to call his mission in question; and particularly to be offended at the humiliations which surrounded it on earth. Such was their conduct who said, *Is not this the carpenter's son? Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? A gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*

To speak against the Holy Ghost, was maliciously to reject a doctrine; when he who delivered it, confirmed the truth of it by so distinguished and evident a miracle as healing a demoniac; and to ascribe those miracles to the devil, which, they were assured, had God alone for their author. Here, I conceive, is all the light we can derive from the text. And as many persons determine the sense of a text, not so much by the letter as the reputation of the interpreter, we must apprise them, that we have derived this explanation, not only from the writings of our most celebrated commentators who have espoused it, but also from the works of the most celebrated of the fathers—I mean Chrysostom. The following is the substance of his paraphrase on the text in St. Matthew:—"You have called me a deceiver, and an enemy of God; I forgive this reproach. Having some cause to stumble at the flesh with which I am clothed, you might not know who I am. But can you be ignorant that the casting out of demons, is the work of the Holy Ghost? For this cause, he who



says, that I do these miracles by Beelzebub, shall not obtain remission."

Such is the comment of Chrysostom, to whom we add the remark of an author, worthy of superior confidence; it is St. Mark, who subjoins these words: *Because the Pharisees said he hath an unclean spirit.* Hence it is inferred that the Pharisees, by ascribing the miracles of the Holy Ghost, to an unclean spirit, were guilty of the identical sin against the Holy Ghost, of which Jesus Christ had spoken; as to me is evidently proved.

The second text we shall explain, occurs in the fifth chapter of the first epistle of St. John. *If any man see his brother sin, a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death: there is a sin unto death: I do not say that ye shall pray for it.* On this question there are, as we usually say, as many opinions as parties.

Consult the doctors of the Roman church, and they will establish, on these words, the frivolous distinction between venial and mortal sins; a conjecture both false, and directly opposed to those from whom it proceeds. Because, if this sense be true, the moment a man commits a mortal sin, prayer must cease with regard to him; and he who commits a venial sin, will still need the prayers of saints to avoid a death he has not deserved: this is not only indefensible, but what the Catholics themselves would not presume to maintain.

Waving the various glosses of the Novatians, and other commentators, do you ask what is the idea we should attach to these words of the apostle, and what

is the sin of which he here speaks? We repeat what we have already intimated, that it is difficult to explain. However, on investigating the views of the apostle throughout the chapter, we discover the sense of this text. His design was, to embolden the young converts in the profession of the religion they had so happily embraced. With this view, he here recapitulates the proofs which established its truth: *There are three that bear witness on earth, the water, and the spirit, and the blood.* It is the innocence of the primitive Christians, which is called *the water*; the miracles which are called *the spirit*; and martyrdom, by which the faithful have sealed their testimony, and which is called *the blood*: attesting that those three classes of witnesses, demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and render its opposers utterly inexcusable.

After these, and similar observations, the apostle says expressly, that he wrote for the confirmation of their faith, and closes with this exhortation: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* Between these two texts, occur the words we wish to explain: *There is a sin unto death: I do not say that ye shall pray for it.* Must not *the sin unto death*, be that against which he wished to fortify the saints; I mean apostacy?

What, say you, is a man lost without remedy who has denied the truth, and is every one in the sad situation of those for whom the apostle prohibits prayer? God forbid, my brethren, that we should preach so strange a doctrine; and once more renew the Novatian severity! There are two kinds of

apostates, and two kinds of apostacies: there is one kind of apostacy into which we fall by the fear of punishment, or on the blush of the moment, by the promises satan makes to his proselytes. There is another, into which we fall by the enmity we have to the truth, by the detestable pleasure we take in opposing its force. It would be cruel to account the first of these offences, *a sin unto death*; but the Spirit of God directs us to attach this idea to the second. There are likewise two kinds of apostates. There is one class, who have made only small attainments in the knowledge of the truth; weak and imperfect Christians unacquainted as yet, with the joys and transports excited in the soul by a religion, which promises the remission of sin, and everlasting felicity. There is another, on the contrary, to whom God has given superior knowledge, to whom he has communicated the gifts of miracles, and whom he has caused to experience the sweetness of his promise. It would be hard to reject the first; but the apostle had regard to the second. Those, according to St. John, who have committed *the sin unto death*, are the persons who abjure Christianity, after the reception of all those gifts.

These observations lead to the illustration of the two passages yet to be explained: the one is in the tenth chapter to the Hebrews; the other is our text. In both these passages it is obvious the apostle had the second class of apostates in view. This is very apparent from our text. Throughout the whole of this epistle, it is easy to prove, that the apostle's wish

was to prevent apostacy. He especially designed to make it evident, that to renounce Christianity, after attesting its confirmation by miracles, here denominated *distributions of the Holy Ghost*, was a crime of the grossest enormity. He has the same design in the text. Let us examine the terms.

1. *They were once enlightened*; that is, they had known the truth. They had compared the prophets with the apostles, the prophecies with the accomplishment; and by the collective force of truth, they were fully persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah. Or, if you please, *they were once enlightened*; that is, *they were baptised*; baptism, in the primitive church, succeeding instruction, according to that precept of Christ, *Go ye and teach all nations, baptising them.* &c. St. Paul, at the beginning of this chapter, speaking of baptism, expresses the same sentiment. So also we are to understand St. Peter, when he says, that *the baptism which now saves us, is not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience.* The answer of a good conscience, is the rectitude of conduct, resulting from the catechumen's knowledge and faith. Hence they commonly gave the appellation of illuminated to a man after baptism. "The washing of baptism," says Justin Martyr, "is called illumination; because he who is instructed in these mysteries, is enlightened." Hence also the Syriac version, instead of *enlightened*, as our reading which follows the Greek, has rendered it *baptized*.

2. *They have tasted of the heavenly gift*: that is, they have experienced the serenity of that *peace*, when we no longer fear the punishment of sin; having



passed, if I may so speak, the rigorous road of repentance, into favour with God.

3. *They were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, they tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.* All these various expressions may be understood of miracles performed in their presence, or achieved by themselves. The Holy Ghost himself has assumed this acceptation, in various parts of the Scriptures, as in that remarkable passage in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost?—We have not so much as heard, whether there be any Holy Ghost.* The good word, says Grotius, is the promise of God, as in the twenty-ninth of Jeremiah, *I will—perform my good word towards you*; that is, my promise; and one of the greatest promises made to the primitive Christians, was the gift of miracles. *These signs, says Jesus, shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with tongues, they shall take up serpents.* In fine, *the powers of the world to come*, were, likewise, the prodigies to be achieved during the gospel economy; which the Jews called the age, or world to come; prodigies, elsewhere called, *the exceeding greatness of his power, and the mighty working of his power.*

These are the endowments, with which the persons in question were favoured; their crime was apostacy. *It is impossible, if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.*

To *fall away*, does not characterize the state of a man, who relapses, after having obtained remission. How deplorable soever his situation may be, it is not



without resource. The falling away in our text signifies a total defection ; an entire rejection of Jesus Christ, and of his religion. The falling away, according to St. Paul, in the ninth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, marks the first stage of obduracy in the Jewish nation. But the falling away in our text, is not only a rejection of Christ, but a rejection after having known him : it is not only to reject, but to outrage and persecute him with malice and enmity of heart. Here is all the information we can derive from the text. The unpardonable sin, in these words, is that of apostates ; and such as we have characterized in the preceding remarks.

This also is the genuine import of the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, *If we sin wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, as would be easy to prove.*

If you have been attentive to all the considerations we have now advanced ; if you have understood the explanations we have given of the several texts, you may form a correct idea of the unpardonable sin. You may know what this crime was, at least, in the time of the primitive church. It was denying, hating, and maliciously opposing the truth, at the moment they were persuaded it proceeded from God. Two classes of men might commit this crime in the apostolic age.

*First*, those who had never embraced Christianity ; but opposed its progress in defiance of rational conviction, and the dictates of conscience. This was the sin of the Pharisees, who maliciously ascribed

to the devil miracles, which they knew could have God alone for their author.

*Secondly*, those who had embraced the gospel, who had been baptized, who had received the gift of miracles, and experienced all the graces enumerated in the text. This was the sin of those, who, after conversion, abjured the truth, and pronounced against Jesus Christ the anathemas which his enemies, and particularly the Jews, required of apostates. These St. Paul had in view, in the words of our text, and in the tenth chapter of this epistle. Of these St. John also spake, when he said, *there is a sin unto death*. Hence the sin described in these three passages, and the sin against the Holy Ghost, is the same in quality, if I may so speak, though diversified in circumstances: we have, consequently, comprised the whole under the vague appellation of *unpardonable sin*.

After these considerations, perhaps, you already begin to rejoice. This sermon, designed to inspire the soul with sanctifying fear, has, perhaps, already contributed to flatter your security: you no longer see any thing in the text, which affects your case; nor any thing in the most disorderly life, connected with a crime, peculiar to the primitive Christians. Let us dissipate, if possible, so dangerous an illusion. We have done little, by tracing the manner in which the first witnesses of the gospel became guilty of the unpardonable sin; we must also inquire, what relation it may have to us.

In general, it is not possible to hear subjects of this nature discussed, without a variety of questions

revolving in the mind, and asking one's self, Have I not already committed this sin? Does not such and such a vice, by which I am captivated, constitute its essence? Or, if I have never committed it yet, may I not fall into it at a future period? It is but just, brethren, to afford you satisfaction on points so important. Never did we discuss more serious questions; and we frankly acknowledge, that all we have hitherto advanced, was merely introductory to what we have yet to say; and for which we require the whole of the attention, with which you have favoured us.

Though truth is always the same, and never accommodates itself to the humors of an audience, it is an invariable duty to resolve these questions according to the characters of the inquirers. The questions amount in substance to this; Can a man in this age commit the unpardonable sin? And, I assure you, they may be proposed from three principles, widely different from each other: from a melancholy, from a timorous, and a cautious disposition. We shall diversify our solutions, correspondent to this diversity of character.

1. One may make this inquiry through a melancholy disposition; and mental derangement is an awful complaint. It is a disease which corrupts the blood, stagnates the spirits, and flags the mind. From the body, it quickly communicates to the soul; it induces the sufferers to regard every object on the dark side; to indulge phantoms, and cherish anguish, which, excluding all consolation, wholly devotes the mind to objects, by which it is alarmed

and tormented. A man of this disposition, on examining his conscience, and reviewing his life, will draw his own character in the deepest colours. He will construe his weakness into wickedness, and his infirmities into crimes ; he will magnify the number, and aggravate the atrocity of his sins ; he will class himself, in short, with the worst of human characters. And our reasons for self condemnation and abasement before God, being always too well founded, the person, in question, proceeding on these principles, and mistaking the causes of humiliation and repentance, for just subjects of horror and despair, readily believes himself lost without resource, and guilty of the unpardonable sin.

Without doubt, it is highly proper to reason with people of this description. We should endeavour to compose them, and enter into their sentiments, in order to attack their arguments with more effect ; but, after all, a man so afflicted has more need of a physician than a minister, and of medicine than sermons. If it is not a hopeless case, we must endeavour to remove the complaint, by means which nature and art afford ; by air, exercise and innocent recreations. Above all, we must pray that God would *cause the bones he has broken to rejoice* ; and that he would not abandon, to the remorse and torments of the damned, souls redeemed by the blood of his beloved Son, and reconciled by his sacrifice.

2. This inquiry may also be made through a timorous disposition. We distinguish timidity from melancholy ; the first being a disposition of the mind, occasioned by the mistaken notions we entertain of



God and his word ; the second, of the body. The timorous man fixes his eye on what the scriptures say of the justice of God, without paying adequate attention to what is said of his mercy. He looks solely at the perfection to which a Christian is called, without ever regarding the leniency of the gospel. Such a man, like the melancholy person, is readily induced to think himself guilty of the unpardonable sin. Should he flatter himself with not having yet perpetrated the deed, he lives in a continual fear. This fear may, indeed, proceed from a good principle, and be productive of happy effects, in exciting vigilance and care ; but, if not incompatible with the liberty of the children of God, it is at least repugnant to the peace they may obtain ; which constitutes one of the sweetest comforts of religion, and one of the most effectual motives to conciliate the heart.

If a man of this description should ask me, whether one may now commit the unpardonable sin ? I would repeat what I have just said, that this sin, in all its circumstances has peculiar reference to the miracles by which God formerly confirmed the evangelical doctrine ; and consequently, to account himself at this period guilty of the crime, is to follow the emotions of fear, rather than the conviction of argument. I would compare the sin which alarms his conscience, with that of the unhappy man of whom we spake. I would prove by this comparison, that the disposition of a man, who utters blasphemy against Jesus Christ, who makes open war with the professors of his doctrine, has no resemblance to the style of another ; who sins with remorse and contri-



tion ; who wrestles with the old man ; who sometimes conquers, and sometimes is conquered : though he has sufficient cause from his sin to perceive, that the love of God by no means properly burns in his heart ; he has, however, encouragement from his victories, to admit that it is not totally extinguished. I would assist this man to enter more minutely into his state ; to consider the holy fears which fill, the terrors which agitate, and the remorse which troubles his heart ; and in such a way as to derive from the cause of his grief, motives of consolation. We should never stretch our subjects, nor divide what Jesus Christ has joined by a happy temperature. If you look solely at the mercy of God, you will unavoidably form excuses to flatter your security ; on confining yourselves to his justice, you will fall into despair. It is by this happy temperature of severity and indulgence, of mercy and justice, of hope and fear, which brings the soul of a saint to general repose : it is this happy temperature which constitutes the beauty of religion, and renders it efficacious in the conversion of mankind. This should be our method with persons of a doubtful disposition.

But woe unto us, if under the pretext of giving the literal import of a text of Scripture, we should conceal its general design ; a design equally interesting to Christians of every age and nation, and which concerns you, my brethren, in a peculiar manner : woe unto us, if under a pretence of composing the consciences of the timorous, we should afford the slightest encouragement to the hardened, to flatter

their security, and confirm them in their obduracy of heart.

3. This inquiry,—Whether we can now commit the unpardonable sin?—may likewise be made on the ground of caution, and that we may know the danger, only in order to avoid it. Follow us in our reply.

We cannot commit this sin with regard to the peculiar circumstances of those, who lived in the first ages of the church. This has been proved, I think, by the preceding arguments; no person having seen Jesus Christ work miracles, and, like the Pharisees, having called him Beelzebub; nor has any one received the gift of miracles, and afterwards denied the truth, as those apostates, of whom we spake. But a man may commit the crime, with regard to what constitutes its essence, and its atrocity. This also we hope to prove. For, I ask, what constituted the enormity of the crime? Was it the miracles, simply considered? Or was it the conviction and sentiments which ensued, and which proceeded from the hearts of the witnesses? Without a doubt it was the conviction and the sentiments, and not the miracles and prodigies, separately considered, and without the least regard to their seeing them performed, or themselves being the workers. If we shall, therefore, prove, that the efforts which Providence now employs for the conversion of mankind, may convey to the mind the same conviction, and excite the same sentiments afforded to the witnesses of these miracles, shall we not consequently prove, that if men now resist the gracious efforts of Providence,

they are equally guilty as the ancients; and of course, that which constitutes the essence and atrocity of the unpardonable sin, subsists at this period, as in the apostolic age.

1. A man, at this period may sin against the clearest light. Do not say that he cannot sin against the same degree of light, which irradiated the primitive church. I allow that none of you have seen the miracles performed for the confirmation of our faith; but I will venture to affirm, that there are truths as palpable, as if they had been confirmed by miracles; I will venture to affirm, that if they collect all the proofs we have of the divine authority of our Saviour's mission, there will result a conviction to the mind as clear, as that which resulted to the Pharisees, on seeing the demoniac healed.

2. What constituted the atrocity of the crime in the first ages, was attacking this religion, whose evidence they had attested. This may also be found among men of our own time. A man, who is convinced that the Christian religion was revealed from heaven;—a man who doubts not, among all the religious connections in the Christian world, that to which he adheres is among the purest;—a man who abandons this religion;—a man who argues, who disputes, who writes volume upon volume, to vindicate his apostacy, and attacks those very truths, whose evidence he cannot but perceive; such a man has not committed the unpardonable sin in its whole extent; but he has so far proceeded as to attack the truths, of whose veracity he was convinced.

3. What further constituted the atrocity of the crime, was *falling away*; not by the fear of punishment, not by the first charms Satan presents to his proselytes, but by a principle of hatred against truths, so restrictive of human passions. This may also be found among men of our own age. For example, a man who mixes in our congregations, who reads our books, who adheres to our worship; but who, in his ordinary conversation, endeavours to discredit those truths, to establish deism or impiety, and abandons himself to this excess, because he hates a religion which gives him inquietude and pain, and wishes to expunge it from every heart; this man has not committed the unpardonable sin in all its extent, but he has so far proceeded as to hate the truth.

4. What, lastly, rendered the crime atrocious with regard to apostates, was their running to this excess, after having tasted the happiness, which the hope of salvation produces in the soul. This may, likewise, be found among Christians of our own age. For, example, a temporary professor;—a man (to avail myself of an expression of Jesus Christ,) who *receives the word with joy*;—a man, who has long prayed with fervour, who has communicated with transports of delight;—a man of this description, who forgets all these delights, who resists all these attractive charms, and sacrifices them to the advantages offered by a false religion; he has not yet committed the unpardonable sin, but he surely has the characteristic of *falling away, after having been once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift.*



You now perceive, my brethren, that all these characteristics may be found separately among men of our own age. But should there be a man in whom they all unite ; a man who has known and abjured the truth ; who has not only abjured, but opposed and persecuted it, not in a moment of surprise, and at the sight of racks and tortures, but from a principle of enmity and hatred ; do you not think he would have just cause to fear, that he had committed the unpardonable sin.

To collect the whole in two words, and in a yet shorter way to resolve the question, " Is it possible now to commit the unpardonable sin ? " I answer ; We cannot commit it with regard to every circumstance ; but, in regard to what constitutes its essence and atrocity, it may be committed ; and though men seldom fall so deeply, yet it is not impossible. Few complete the crime ; but many commit it in part, and in degree. Some imagine themselves to be guilty, by an ill-founded fear ; but a much greater number are daily going the awful road, and, through an obstinate security, unperceived. They ought, of course, to reject the thought of having proceeded to that excess ; but, at the same time, to take precaution, that, in the issue, the dreadful period may never come, which is nearer, perhaps, than they imagine.

#### *Application.*

What effects shall the truths we have delivered produce on your minds ? Shall they augment your



pride, excite vain notions of your virtue, and suggest an apology for vice, because you cannot, in the portrait we have given, recognise your own character? Is your glory derived from the consideration, that your depravity has not attained the highest pitch; and that there yet remains one point of horror, at which you have not arrived? Will you suffer the wounds to corrode your heart, under the notions that they are not desperate, and that there is still a remedy? And do you expect to repent, and to ask forgiveness, when repentance is impracticable; and when all access to mercy is cut off?

But who among our hearers can be actuated by so great a frenzy? What deluded conscience can enjoy repose under a pretext, that it has not yet committed the unpardonable sin? Whence is it, after all, that this crime is so dreadful? All the reasons which may be assigned, terminate here, as in their centre, that it precipitates the soul into hell. But is not hell the end of every sin? There is this difference, it must be observed, between the unpardonable sin, and other sins, that he who commits it is lost without resource; whereas, after other sins, we have a sure remedy in conversion. But, in all cases, a man must repent, reform, and become a new creature; for we find in religion, what we find in the human body; some diseases quite incurable, and others which may be removed with application and care: but they have both the similarity of becoming incurable by neglect; and what, at first, was but a slight indisposition, becomes mortal by presumption and delay.

Besides, there are few persons among us,—there are few monsters in nature,—capable of carrying wickedness, all at once, to the point we have described. But how many are there who walk the awful road, and who attain to it by degrees? They do not arrive, in a moment, at the summit of impiety. The first essays of the sinner, are not those horrid traits which cause nature to recoil. A man, educated in the Christian religion, does not descend, all at once, from the full lustre of truth, to the profoundest darkness. His fault, at first, was mere detraction; thence he proceeded to negligence; thence to vice; next he stifles remorse; and, lastly, proceeds to the commission of enormous crimes: so he, who, in the beginning, trembled at the thought of a weakness, becomes insensible of the foulest deeds, and of a conduct the most atrocious.

There is one reflection with which you cannot be too much impressed, in an age, in which Jesus Christ approaches us with his light, with his spirit, and with all the advantages of the evangelical economy; that is, concerning the awful consequences of not improving these privileges, according to their original design. You rejoice to live in the happy age, which *so many kings and prophets have desired to see*. You have reason so to do. But you rejoice in these privileges, while each of you persists in a favorite vice, and a predominant habit; and because you are neither Jews nor heathens, you expect to find, in religion, means to compose a conscience, abandoned to every kind of vice: this is a most extraordinary, and almost general prejudice among Christians. But this

light, in which you rejoice,—this Christianity, by which you are distinguished,—this faith, which constitutes your glory, will aggravate your condemnation, if your lives continue unreformed. The Pharisees were highly favoured by seeing Jesus Christ in the flesh, by attesting his miracles, and hearing the wisdom which descended from his lips ; but these were the privileges which caused their sin to be irremissible. The Hebrews were happy by being enlightened, by tasting of the heavenly gift, and the powers of the evangelical economy ; but this happiness, on their falling away, rendered their loss irreparable.

Apply this thought to the various means, which Providence affords for your conversion ; and think what effect it must produce on your preachers. It suspends our judgment, and ties our hands, if I may so speak, in the exercise of our ministry. We are animated at the sight of the blessing which the gospel brings ; but, when we contemplate the awful consequences on those who resist, we are astonished and appalled.

Must we wilfully exclude the light ? What effects have the efforts of Providence produced on you ? What account can you give of the numerous privileges, with which Heaven has favoured you ? Think not that we take pleasure in declamations, and in drawing frightful portraits of your conduct. Would to God that our preaching were so received, and so improved, as to change our censures into applause, and all your strictures into approbation. But charity is never opposed to experience. So many ex-

hortations, so many entreaties, so many affectionate warnings, so many pathetic sermons, so many instructions, so many conflicts to save you from vice, leave the proud in his pride, the implacable in his hatred, the fashionable woman in full conformity to the world, and every other in his predominating sin. What line of conduct shall we consequently adopt? Shall we continue to enforce the truth, to press the duties of morality, and to trace the road of salvation, in which you refuse to walk? We have already said, that these privileges will augment your loss, and redouble the weight of your chains. Must we shut up these churches? Must we overturn these pulpits? Must we exile these pastors? And making that the object of our prayer, which ought to be our justest cause of fear, must we say, Lord, take away thy word; take away thy Spirit; and remove thy candlestick; lest, receiving too large a portion of grace, we should augment the account we have to give, and render our punishment more intolerable.

But why abandon the soul to so tragical a thought? Lord, continue with us these precious pledges *of thy loving-kindness, which is better than life*, and give us a new heart. It is true, my brethren, a thousand objects indicate, that you will persist in impiety. But I know not what sentiment flatters us, that you are about to renounce it. These were St. Paul's sentiments concerning the Hebrews: he saw the efforts of the world to draw them from the faith, and the almost certain fall of some: in the mean time he hoped, and by an argument of charity, that the equity of God would be interested to prevent



their fall. He hoped further ; he hoped to see an event of consolation. Hence he opened to the Hebrews the paths of tribulation in which they walked with courage. He called to their remembrance so many temptations refuted, so many enemies confounded, so many conflicts sustained, so many victories obtained, so many trophies of glory already prepared ; and, proposing himself for a model, he animated them by the idea of what they had already achieved, and by what they had yet to do. *Call to remembrance*, says he, *the former days, in which ye endured so great a fight of afflictions, partly whilst you were made a gazingstock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward,* Heb. x. 32, 33, 35. We address the like exhortation to each of our hearers. We remind you of whatever is most to be admired in your life, though weak and imperfect, the communions you have celebrated, the prayers you have offered to heaven, the tears of repentance already shed.

And you, my brethren, my dear brethren, and honoured countrymen, I call to your recollection, as St. Paul to the Hebrews, the earth strewed with the bodies of your martyrs, and stained with your blood ;—the desert populated with your fugitives ;—the places of your nativity desolated ; your tenderest ties dissolved ;—your prisoners in chains, and confessors in irons ;—your houses rased to the foundation ; and the precious remains of your shipwreck



scattered on all the shores of Christendom. Oh ! *Let us not cast away our confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.* Let not so many conflicts be lost ; let us never forsake this Jesus to whom we are devoted ; but let us daily augment the ties which attach us to his communion.

If these are your sentiments, fear neither the terrors nor anathemas of the Scriptures. As texts, the most consolatory, have an awful aspect to them who abuse their privileges, so passages the most terrific, have a pleasing aspect to those who obey the calls of grace. The words we have explained are of this kind ; for the apostle speaking of a certain class of sinners, who cannot be *renewed again unto repentance*, implies thereby, that all other sinners, of whatsoever kind, may be renewed. Let us therefore repent. Let us break these hearts. Let us soften these stones. Let us cause floods of tears to issue from the dry and barren rocks. And after we have passed through the horrors of repentance, let our hearts rejoice in our salvation. Let us banish all discouraging fears. Let us pay the homage of confidence to a merciful God, never confounding repentance with despair. Repentance honours the Deity ; despair degrades him. Repentance adores his goodness ; despair suppresses one of his brightest beams of glory. Repentance follows the example of saints ; despair confounds the human kind with demons. Repentance ascribes to the blood of the Redeemer of the world its real worth ; despair accounts it *an unholy thing*. Let us enter into these reflections ; let this day be

equally the triumph of repentance over the horrors of sin, and the triumph of grace over the anguish of repentance. God grant us this grace ; to him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory for ever. Amen.

FINIS.













